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MODERN

ONE ACT PLAYS

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MODERN ONE-ACT PLAYS

(A collection of six one-act plays)



**CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION
NEW DELHI**

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FOREWORD

The book of Modern One-act Plays is designed to meet the needs of students in the Higher Secondary classes. It is one of the text-books which the Central Board of Secondary Education has undertaken to prepare for the teaching of English at the Higher Secondary stage.

The Board expresses its appreciation of the interest taken by the Editor as well as the members of the Advisory Board in the preparation of this book.

R. P. SINGHAL,
Secretary,
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THE WISE JUDGE

R.M. SENFORTH

Characters

MUSTAFHA, THE CALIPH

ALI

JUDGE

WRITER

FARMER

BUTCHER

OIL MERCHANT

OFFICERS

THE WISE JUDGE

MUSTAPHA, *the Caliph*, has heard that a judge in his kingdom is as wise in his decisions as SOLOMON ; so he went out to test the truth of this report, dressed like a private man and mounted on his horse.

SCENE I

Place : A Street in Baghdad

Characters : MUSTAPHA (*the Caliph*)

ALI (*a lame beggar*)

ALI (*seizing the end of MUSTAPHA'S robe as he rides*)
Alms, kind sir, alms, in the name of Allah !

MUSTAPHA (*handing him some money*). Take this, and Allah bless you ! (*Ali still holds on to the robe.*)
What more do you want ? Have I not given you alms ?

ALI. Yes, great master, but the law says not only shalt thou give alms to thy brother, but also do for thy brother in soever thou canst.

MUSTAPHA. Well, and what can I do for you ?

ALI. You can save me from being trodden under the feet of men and beasts, for this will surely happen to me in these crowded streets.

MUSTAPHA. How can I save you ?

ALI. By letting me ride behind you, and putting me safely in the market-place where I have business.

MUSTAPHA. Be it so. Come, climb up be
(*Stooping down, he helps the cripple to mount the horse.*
At length they reach the market-place.) Here we are at
market-place. Is this where you wished to stop?

ALI. Yes.

MUSTAPHA (*impatiently*). Then get down.

ALI. No, no, it is you who must get down.

MUSTAPHA. But why, friend?

ALI. That I may have the horse.

MUSTAPHA. That you may have the horse! What
you mean?

ALI. I mean that he belongs to me. If you
get down I will take the case before the judge. We
the town of the just judge, you know, and he will
certainly decide in my favour.

MUSTAPHA. But why should he when the animal
mine?

ALI. When he sees us—you with your strong
limbs that Allah has given you for the purpose of
working, and I with my poor crippled feet—he will decide
the horse belongs to him who has most need of it.

MUSTAPHA. If he does that he is not a just judge.

ALI (*laughing*). Oh, as to that, although he
I expect he can make mistakes like every one else.
It is to prove that it is your horse?

MUSTAPHA (*to himself*). This will be a good
opportunity to test the wisdom of the judge.

ALI. What are you muttering about?

MUSTAPHA. Nothing that will interest you, my
neighbouring beggar—but I am content with your plan. Let
it be before the judge.

Place : The Judge's Court.

Characters : JUDGE, WRITER, FARMER, BUTCHER, OIL
MERCHANT, MUSTAPHA, ALI, OFFICERS.

(The WRITER and the FARMER have quarrelled over a young slave—as to which owned him. The slave is deaf and dumb and cannot speak for either. When MUSTAPHA and ALI enter, the judge is just going to try this case.)

JUDGE. Are the writer, the farmer, and the slave present ?

OFFICER *(bowing)*. They are here, my lord.

JUDGE. Let the farmer speak first.

FARMER *(bowing low)*. Great judge, this boy you see is my slave. I bought him only last week. This man has stolen him from me. I pray you, make him give me back my slave.

WRITER *(eagerly)*. It is not true, my lord. This boy has been my slave for several years ; I have taught him to be very useful to me. It is the farmer who is guilty. He stole my slave from me last week and declares he bought him in the market. I pray you, restore my slave to me. I can bring forward my friends, who have often seen this boy at my house.

JUDGE. I do not need the help of your friends. Perhaps, to please you, they may sin against the truth. I will decide this matter. Leave the boy here and return

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tomorrow. (FARMER and WRIGHT go out.) What case next ?

OFFICER. The case of the butcher and the oil merchant.

JUDGE. Let them come forward. (*They come forward.* the MERCHANT holding the BUTCHER'S wrist.) I will hear what the butcher has to say.

BUTCHER (*bowing low.*) My lord, judge, I went to some oil from this man, and, in order to pay for it, I took a handful of money from my pocket. The sight must have tempted him, for he seized me by the wrist and wrench the money from me. I cried out, but he would not let me go. So we have come before you, great judge, holding my money, and he still grasping my wrist. O my lord and most wise judge, I declare in the name of Allah that the money is mine.

JUDGE. Now, oil merchant, what have you to say ?

OIL MERCHANT. This man came to purchase oil from me. When I gave him the bottle he asked if I could change a gold piece. I drew out a handful of money and laid it on a barrel in my shop. He seized it and was walking off with it, when I caught him by the wrist and called out "Robber". In spite of my cries, however, he would not give up the money ; so I brought him here to you, great judge, might decide the case. I declare that this money is truly mine.

JUDGE. Leave the money with me and return tomorrow. (*They give the money to an OFFICER, then both go low and depart.*) What is the next case ?

OFFICER. The case of two men who each lay claim to a fine Arab horse.

JUDGE. Let them come forward. (MUSTAPHA and ALI come forward, bowing low. JUDGE addresses MUSTAPHA.) What have you to say ?

MUSTAPHA (*bowing again*). My lord, judge, I came from afar to visit your city. At the gate I met this cripple, who first asked in the name of Allah for alms, and then that he might ride behind me to the market-place. When we arrived there he refused to dismount, declaring that the horse belonged to him, and that you, most righteous judge, would decide in his favour, because, so he says, he has most need of the horse. That, my lord, is a true statement of the case.

JUDGE. Now let the cripple speak.

CRIPPLE. My lord, what has been said is not true. I was on my way to the market-place, riding this horse, which belongs to me, when I saw a traveller half dead with fatigue. In the kindness of my heart I offered to let him ride with me to the market-place. He accepted the offer eagerly and indeed thanked me. What was my astonishment, then, when he refused to dismount and declared that my horse was his ! Without any delay I have brought him before you, O judge, in order that you may decide between us.

JUDGE. Leave the horse here and return tomorrow.

SCENE III

Place : The Judge's Court again.

Time : The next day.

Characters : The same.

JUDGE. Where are the writer and the farmer ?

OFFICER (*bowing*). They are here, my lord, and the butcher and the oil merchant, the man who calls himself Mustapha, and the cripple Ali.

JUDGE. Let the writer come forward. (*WRITER comes forward bowing.*) The slave is yours : that is my judgment. Take him home. Officer, give the farmer fifty blows for stealing the slave and lying about it. (*WRITER goes off happily with his slave. OFFICER leads out the FARMER.*) Now let the oil merchant and the butcher come forward. Here, butcher, is the money. It is truly yours, and the oil merchant has no right to any part of it. Go in peace.

BUTCHER. Allah be praised, my innocence is proved (*Bows low and goes out.*)

JUDGE. Officer, give this oil merchant two score lashes that he may remember not to be dishonest. (*OIL MERCHANT is led out.*) Let Mustapha and Ali now come forward. Mustapha, would you recognize your horse among others ?

MUSTAPHA. Surely, my lord.

JUDGE. Follow me.

SCENE IV

Place : The Stables.

(*Enter JUDGE, MUSTAPHA, and OFFICER.*)

JUDGE. Now, Mustapha, point out your horse.

MUSTAPHA (*going up to his horse*). Here it is, my lord.

JUDGE. 'Tis well, Mustapha. Return now to the court-room. Officer, bring Ali here. (*MUSTAPHA goes out and OFFICER returns with ALI.*)

JUDGE. Point now, Ali, to the horse that belongs to you. Be sure you make no mistake. Approach and touch the horse that I may know, without doubt, which one is yours.

ALI (*going up with confidence to the same horse*). This, my lord, is mine.

JUDGE Good. Now let us return to the court-room.

SCENE V

Place. The Court-room again.

JUDGE. Mustapha, the horse is yours. Go to the stables and take him. Officer, give this rogue fifty lashes. He well deserves them, in as much as he tried to wrong the man who had befriended him. Allah be praised, our work for today is done. (*All go out except MUSTAPHA.*) Why do you wait, Mustapha? Are you not satisfied with the judgment given?

MUSTAPHA. Truly, O judge, I am satisfied, but I long to know how you arrived at your decisions, for I am sure that your judgments in the first two cases were as just as in mine. Know that I am Mustapha, Caliph of Baghdad, and I came hither to test you. I find that you are indeed a wise judge. Tell me, I pray you, how you arrived at your decisions.

JUDGE (*bowing low and kissing his master's hand*).

Glory and prosperity be to you, O Prince of the Faithful and Protector of Believers.

MUSTAPHA. Rise, friend. I desire that you tell me the reasons for your judgments.

JUDGE. O Prince of the Faithful, it is very simple. Your Highness saw that I postponed my decisions until today ?

MUSTAPHA. Yes, I saw that.

JUDGE. Well, this morning I called the slave and by signs I bade him put fresh ink into my inkstand. This he did promptly and carefully, as if he had done the thing a hundred times before. I said to myself, 'This boy has not been the slave of a farmer. He belongs to the writer.'

MUSTAPHA. Good ! And the butcher ? How did you reach that decision ?

JUDGE. Did you notice, O Prince of the Faithful, that the oil merchant had his clothes and hands covered with oil ?

MUSTAPHA. Surely I did.

JUDGE. Well, last night I placed the money in a vessel filled with water. This morning when I looked at it there was not a particle of oil to be seen on the surface of the water. I said to myself, 'If this money belonged to the oil merchant it would be greasy from the touch of his hands. As it is not, the butcher's story must be true.'

MUSTAPHA. Good again ! And my horse ? How did you find out the truth about that ?

JUDGE. O Prince of the Faithful, that was difficult. Until this morning I was greatly puzzled.

MUSTAPHA. The cripple did not recognize the horse, I suppose ?

JUDGE. On the contrary, O Protector of the Poor, he pointed him out at once.

MUSTAPHA. How, then, did you discover that he was not the owner ?

JUDGE. Commander of the Faithful, I brought you to the stables separately not to see whether you would know the horse, but whether the horse would know you. When you approached him, the creature turned towards you, thrust his head forward, and looked at you with affection ; but when the cripple touched him, he laid back his ears and made signs as if to side away. Then I knew that you were truly his master.

MUSTAPHA. Allah has bestowed upon you wisdom above the ordinary, and you are worthy to fill my place. But I, the Caliph, could not fill yours, most wise judge, and henceforth, yours shall be the highest office in the land next after mine. Let it be written in the records of our court.



RANA PRATAP

E.L. TURNBULL

Characters

RANA PRATAP SINGH

TEJSI

TARA

MIRA

PRINCE AMRA

RAO SAKTA

BHAMA SAH

RANA PRATAP

[With the accession of RANA PRATAP SINGH, it seemed as if Mewar had entered upon happier days. The new ruler possessed all the heroic qualities that had distinguished his grandfather, Rana Sangram Singh (Sanga).]

Unfortunately he had no less a foe to deal with than the Emperor Akbar who, realizing the strength of Pratap's resistance, sent out his most powerful forces to reduce the little kingdom and force its brave defender to pay homage to Delhi.

At the battle of Haldighati in 1576, PRATAP SINGH was completely defeated, his army routed, and he himself forced to flee unattended to the mountains. From this time he and his family and the remnants of his brave army became homeless wanderers, as fortress after fortress fell before the concentrated attack of the Mogul generals. At last, sadly wasted, the Rana's party were forced to take refuge in a wild tract of the Aravalli hills, where they were treated with faithful kindness by the Bhils, a forest tribe. Here the royal children slept in baskets hung upon the branches of trees, so that they might be safe from wild beasts. The Rani and the young wife of Pratap Singh's eldest son PRINCE AMRA themselves cooked the frugal meals. Their privation became so acute, however, that

Pratap Singh decided to leave Mewar and to found a fresh kingdom beyond the desert, on the banks of the Indus. He was saved from exile by the generous fidelity of his Chief Minister, the story of which makes one of the proudest pages in the history of Rajasthan.]

SCENE I

THE FUGITIVES

(A mountain plateau in the Aravalli, near Chaond. Here RANA PRATAP SINGH, with his family and a few faithful followers, had found a temporary refuge. The plateau is surrounded by dense jungle and is far from all human haunts, except for a few huts occupied by hill-folk. Seated under a tree TARA and TEJSI, the children of the Rana, are talking together. The girl is about eight years old, and the boy two or three years younger. From where they are they can see a long distance across the plains, and the Mogul encampment at the foot of the mountains.)

TEJSI (wistfully). Would it be so wrong to want to live in Delhi? The children there eat honey-cakes the whole day long.

TARA (indignantly). Would it be wrong? And you a Rana's son! Look out across the plains. As far as you can see and miles beyond stretches out Mewar, which all belonged to us until the Moguls came and with great guns blew our forts to pieces. And yet you talk of Delhi, you greedy little boy!

TEJSI. You want to make me cry. But see, you cannot. I am a Rana's son. I only meant if he was

King of Delhi, I'd like a honey-cake—just one, *weeps suddenly*) I am *so* hungry.

TARA. Don't cry. See, here's a cake. A child ran out when I was passing by a little hut all made of mud and grass, but very pretty. She watched me through the tangle of her hair, and when I smiled, fell down before me on her knees and cried 'Princess!' giving me this.

TEJSI. I don't know how she knew you were a Princess with not an anklet or a bracelet on you, and your faded cotton *sari*.

TARA. Perhaps it is not clothes or jewels which show royal birth. But take your cake.

TEJSI. How good of you not to eat it !

TARA (*raefully*). I wanted to, oh *how* I wanted to! but I thought of you, a little boy *so* hungry.

TEJSI. It looks like a honey-cake.

TARA. It is, and no nasty Delhi with it either. Come, eat it up and then we'll play a game.

TEJSI. What shall we play ?

TARA. Oh, I'll be Sita, and you can be Rama—that is, if you speak no more of Delhi. If you do, then you must be Ravana.

TEJSI. I won't! I won't be Ravana. Why, he was wicked, Tara!

TARA. There, I only said it to tease you. Is the cake good ?

TEJSI. So good that I'm eating it crumb by crumb to make it last the longer.

TARA. I heard our mother say today that she had no

more flour. Nothing at all from which to make our dinner.

TEJSI. What *shall* we do ?

TARA. Well, listen. When mother said that, the Rana was lying stretched out upon the grass quiet, quite tired out. We thought he was asleep but he sprang up and oh! his face was terrible. I wanted to run away, but was afraid to move.

TEJSI. What happened then ?

TARA. He strode across the grass until he came to the edge of the ravine—you know, the place from which you see the Mogul camp quite plainly—and then he raised his hand—I think perhaps, I should not tell you...

TEJSI. Oh do. I'll be a man quite soon.

TARA. Well, then he called upon the gods to punish Akbar, to send to him all manner of evil things, famine and sickness and—*bad sons*. You know how loud the thunder crashed last night, roll after roll, and not a drop of rain, the lightning looking amongst the rocks like fiery snakes...

TEJSI (*fearfully*). All that great noise! Do you think it was the gods getting ready ?

TARA. Who knows ? Nurse said so, but Mother told her to be silent, knowing that I was listening.

TEJSI. Then there will be no food today, not even for the Rana ? (*Hides the last morsel of his cake in the bosom of his tunic.*)

TARA. Oh yes, there will be *some* food, for even as Mother said there was no flour, Amra's wife ran up and

whispered that she knew a way of grinding the grass that grows about here and making it when ground into bread. She is so clever; although born a Princess, she cooks and sews and knows hundreds of stories.

TEJSI. She's just like Sita, grand and gentle too.

TARA. I hope that Amra will not make her cry or send her off to some far jungle.

TEJSI. Here she comes!

TARA. Mira darling, we were just saying how like Sita you are.

(MIRA, the girl-wife of Prince AMRA, joins the children and sits down beside them. Then with a teasing smile she draws out from the folds of her sari a little book, and pretends to read.)

TARA. Now, Mira, that's too bad. Aren't you going to tell us a story? You know that we can't read yet.

MIRA. (smiling again). That is because you are lazy little things.

TEJSI. It is *not*, it is not really. There has been no time for anyone to teach us. You see we do not stay very long anywhere, lest Akbar should catch us and take us off to Delhi.

TARA (in a sing-song voice). Then you'd have plenty of honey-cakes, honey-cakes, honey-cakes...

MIRA. Don't tease him, Tara. Akbar will never catch you, don't you fear. Prince Amra has a great sword, silver and gold. Rawat Krishna gave it to him. It once belonged to Rana Sanga; so you see we are all quite safe.

I'll tell you a secret. The Emperor Akbar himself can read!

TEJSI. I'll learn before he can.

MIRA. I'm sure you will. Shall I tell you a story?

BOTH CHILDREN. Yes! please do.

MIRA (*putting one arm round each child*). Now what shall the story be?

TEJSI (*quickly*). Something about great battles.

MIRA (*sadly*). Ah no! We hear enough about battles every day, those past and others to come...

TARA. Tell us the story of the little hare whose shadow falls on the moon when it is at the full:

MIRA. Once, long ago.. (*Mira tells the story.*)

TARA. And that is why we see the outline of a hare upon the moon?

MIRA. The story tells us so. But see, children, the sun is setting. The Rana has ordered all to be with him before daylight dies.

(*She gives a hand to each child, and together the little group moves towards the camp, all that is left now of Rana Pratap Singh.*)

SCENE II

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

(PRATAP SINGH with the remnants of his followers, his family and their attendants, is encamped at the foot of Aravalli. It is dusk, and the chain of mountain fortresses

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looms like an impregnable black wall above them. The ROYAL LADIES are resting after the fatigues of the march; the RANA and his son PRINCE AMRA stand together, withdrawn a little from the rest of the warriors.)

PRATAP SINGH (*speaking with calm bitterness*). Come, Amra, look your last upon the land where you were born; 'twas meant for your inheritance, long have I striven for it and you. Look once again, then turn your eyes towards exile. This is the last phase of Pratap Singh of Mewar.

PRINCE AMRA (*vehemently*). Father, I would have fought until my sword was broken at the hilt, or I had fallen dead, rather than leave our country.

PRATAP SINGH. And so would I, my son, for what is life when exiled, and stripped of all which made each day a fresh and fine adventure? (*Waves a hand towards where the ladies are placed.*) But what of those poor women, the queen and your new-wed wife, a gallant child but tender?

PRINCE AMRA. Mira! if I had died for Mewar, we had long decided that this good sword of mine should have set her free.

PRATAP SINGH (*shocked*). That lovely maiden—you would have killed her, Amra?

PRINCE AMRA (*proudly*). Yes, killed her so that no rough hand should touch her robe. She wished it, being a Rajput woman, and begged me with many tears never to leave her.

PRATAP SINGH (*with a sigh almost of relief*). Well, she at least is safe, and my dear queen, the noblest woman

ever given to man. Come, look your last, dear Prince! The light is failing: then break your sword, and lay it shattered as a last offering upon the tomb of your father Mewar.

PRINCE AMRA (*in great distress*). What! break your sword, Maharana! Do not ask me. It is the very sword that Rawat Krishna gave me, bidding me be the knight of the great Rana, Pratap Singh.

PRATAP SINGH (*brokenly*). Good, noble, brave Salubhar! If he spoke so, then Amra, keep your sword, I'll keep mine. I had intended to live the life of a private man, even turn shepherd and watch goats like great Sanga did...

PRINCE AMRA (*cheerfully*). And very badly, getting a cuff from his rough master.

PRATAP SINGH. Kings are not suited to a shepherd's staff, though even they may learn. Well, Amra, your brave spirit has helped my own, fallen so low that the vast desert stretching out before us might well have been a bier.

PRINCE AMARA (*shyly*). I'm glad you are comfortable. But who is this approaching? An old, old man; a Brahmin from his dress, and all his company are Brahmans too, a warrior among them.

PRATAP SINGH. Strange, in these warlike times, an unarmed band. Perhaps they carry daggers 'neath their robes. It seems they are friendly...

PRINCE AMRA. Shall I ask their business? Here comes Rao Sakta. (*Moves forward quickly to meet* RAO SAKTA, the Chief of the Saktawats, who is accompanying

Rana into exile.) Uncle, who are these? Brahmans, by their dress. It's very strange that they should seek the Rana at this late hour.

RAO SAKTA (*gaily*). Who, who are these? Why, nephew, pilgrims surely, who seek the safety of our armed escort. Even the desert might conceal a band of thieves or some sharp spy of Akbar's.

PRINCE AMRA (*laughing too*). To *steal* from you! That would be clever! (*Earnestly*) 'Tis not for myself I want good tidings...

RAO SAKTA. Ha!

PRINCE AMRA (*laughing again*). How good it is to laugh once more!

RAO SAKTA. Sssh! You will awake the queen. She'll think you crazy, for mirth has long been absent from our thoughts.

PRINCE AMRA. But have you good news?

RAO SAKTA. Well, middling good.

PRINCE AMRA. Then share it with the Rana.

RAO SAKTA. It is all this. The Chief Minister, Bhama Sah, has come to say farewell, to wish the Rana happy days and all good fortune.

PRINCE AMRA (*disappointed*). 'Good fortune—happy days?' When far from Mewar! So that's your news. Good Bhama Sah meant well, but yet another parting will make it harder for my father. See how he stands there, Uncle, quiet, quite alone.

RAO SAKTA (*quickly*). His back is not towards Mewar. (*Crosses over the grass to where the Rana is*

standing, still gazing at the dim outline of the peaks of the Aravalli. He seems to have forgotten the arrival of RAO SAKTA *touches him on the arm*). Patta! Patta, I have news for you. Bhama Sah wishes to pay his respects to you: *(significantly)* Some great benevolent purpose brings him after us.

PRATAP SINGH. Good, kind old man. For generations his family have served the State. Well, bring him to me, this grassy plot must be my hall of audience. *(SAKTA hurries off and returns with the venerable figure of BHAMA SAH, whom he leaves alone with the Rana. The Minister prostrates himself at the feet of PRATAP SINGH)* Rise, my good friend. No longer am I Lord of Mewar only a poor wanderer. *(Bitterly)* My caravan, it would disgrace a gipsy.

BHAMA SAH *(rises to his feet and stands with folded hands and bent head in front of his master)*. Maharana, long ago my ancestors found favour with the Lords of Mewar. Since then, thanks to a grand and generous ruler, great prosperity has attended all our family. No need of hardship, has ever caused the Rana to levy a tax upon our private fund. And so we find ourselves rich in a land of ruin. While Princes hungered, we have hoarded gold.

PRATAP SINGH *(wearily)*. Why not? The gold was not ill-gotten, your own to hoard or spend. No stain has ever touched your honour, my good Bhama Sah. But what of this? I'm glad to feel there's one my conflict has not ruined. So go your way and take your

Rana's blessing, even if he calls himself so for the last time.

BHAMA SAH. The hoarded wealth of many years I've brought for your acceptance...

PRATAP SINGH (*in amazement*). For mine?

BHAMA SAH. I've not kept one gold coin, nor anything I thought could swell the fund. Dear Lord, my kindest noblest master, I have lived to greet the day when I might bring my service to one full and splendid close. I've wealth enough to feed and arm your warriors for twelve or fifteen years. Not just a few brave men, but twenty, thirty thousand lusty Rajputs. Come, how's that for Akbar? We'll soon show him, and his Moguls too, how Mewar men may rally. Up upon the hill-side, I passed a Mogul camp. A merry crew, all drinking good riddance to the Rana, the flying Rana Pratap. We stole so quietly by them, they little knew how near them a band of well-picked swordsmen, looking like humble pilgrims, passed. They little knew our purpose or how, below Kumbhalmer, we'd saddled sixty horses, who had descended the rocky paths, each moving as quietly as a leopard on its padded paws.

PRATAP SINGH. Your tidings almost take away my power of speech. Am I awake? I fear this is all a dream.

BHAMA SAH (*delighted*). A dream, my Rana! Look, is that a dream? (*Points to body of horsemen who are approaching the camp cautiously.*) We muffled all the trappings, tricked out the men like mummies. A Mogul straying from his camp and meeting such a party, would

have gone mad with fear thinking he saw the ghosts of Rana Pratap's band, believing you far away across the sandy desert, with every faithful Rajput following your blood-red flag.

PRATAP SINGH. And you, brave Bhama Sah, came all unarmed to bring me joy, the like I have not felt since the grand day when, hailed as Mewar's ruler, I led the hunt.

BHAMA SAH. That *was* a day! But do not prize my valour quite so highly. Beneath my pilgrim's robe, I wear light mail. My sword lies snug inside. Once in the days of Sanga, that sword saw service. I've never drawn it since, but spent my life toiling for this great moment.

PRATAP SINGH. If good days come, and the Sesodia plant once again the emblem of the Sun above Chitor your family shall be still further honoured. I hail you Bhama Sah, Saviour of Mewar.

BHAMA SAH (*very simply*). I love you, Maharana, you and all your race. I ask for no reward but still to serve you. The moon is rising; what a night to take the Mogul outpost unawares and then press on to Dawar! Shabez Khan himself is making merry, thinking you toiling across the desert with your face turned towards forgetfulness.

PRATAP SINGH. You are a counsellor as golden as the money you give so freely for our country. I feel my sword like some live thing, pricking me on to action. Come, let us rejoin the Chiefs. This is grand news for them. (*He moves towards the camp where* RAO SAKTA and

PRINCE AMRA are waiting anxiously for news of the interview. BHAMA SAH follows the RANA, still mindful of his royal rank. But PRATAP SINGH waits for him and, taking him by the arm, leads him to PRINCE AMRA.) My son, salute the noblest man that ever Mewar reared. *gave birth*

PRINCE AMRA (*puzzled but willing to believe his father*). My thanks and greeting, Bhama Sah.

RAO SAKTA. And mine, if it was you who mounted the sixty horsemen who have joined us.

BHAMA SAH. And sixty more for every mile between this camp and Dawer.

RAO SAKTA (*uproariously*). This is a man! If Akbar knew, he'd barter half his captains for such a one. Why, Raja Birbal, whom there's so much talk about, is but a shadow of our shrewd Bhama Sah.

BHAMA SAH (*drily*). We'll see when this night's work is over. Maharanaji, I ask your leave to depart. You too have much to think of. At every mile are posted well-armed men. They know the signal. Farewell, and Heaven be with you in your most noble purpose.

[*With a fresh prostration, BHAMA SAH takes leave of the RANA, and, collecting his innocent-looking guard, returns the way he has come. As he passes the sixty, horsemen, there is a clash of steel, and sixty swords flash out in the moon-light. BHAMA SAH raises his hand as if blessing the swords, and then moves into the shadow of the rocks that overhang the mountain track, and is lost to sight.*]

THE DEATH TRAP

***"Saki"* (H.H. MUNRO)**

Characters

DIMITRI, reigning prince of Kedaria

DR. STRONETZ, the prince's personal physician

COL. GIRNITZA	}	Officers of the Kranitzki Regiment of Guards
MAJOR VONTIEFF		
CAPTAIN SHULTZ		

THE DEATH TRAP

[SCENE : An ante-chamber in the Prince's Castle at Tzern.

Time: The Present Day. The scene opens about ten o'clock in the evening.

An ante-chamber, rather sparsely furnished. Some rugs of Balkan manufacture on the walls. A narrow table in centre of room, another table set with wine bottles and goblets near window (right). Some high-backed chairs set here and there round the room. Tiled stove (left). Door in centre.]

(GIRNITZA, VONTIEFF and SHULTZ are talking together as curtain rises.)

GIRNITZA. The Prince suspects something: I can see it in his manner.

SHULTZ. Let him suspect. He'll know for certain in half an hour's time.

GIRNITZA. The moment the Andrieff Regiment has marched out of the town we are ready for him.

SHULTZ (*drawing revolver from case and aiming it at an imaginary person*). And then—short shrift for his Royal Highness! I don't think many of my bullets will go astray.

GIRNITZA. The revolver was never a favourite weapon of mine. I shall finish the job with this.

[Half draws his sword and sends it back into its scabbard with a click.]

VONTIEFF. Oh, we shall do for him right enough. It is a pity he's such a boy, though. I would rather we had a grown man to deal with.

GIRNITZA. We must take our chance when we can find it. Grown men marry and breed heirs and then one has to massacre a whole family. When we've killed this boy we've killed the last of the dynasty, and laid the way clear for Prince Karl. As long as there was one of this brood left our good Karl could never win the throne.

VONTIEFF. Oh, I know this is our great chance. Still I wish the boy could be cleared out of our path by the finger of Heaven rather than by our hands.

SHULTZ. Hush! Here he comes.

[Enter, by door, centre, PRINCE DIMITRI, in undress cavalry uniform. He comes straight into room, begins taking cigarette out of a case, and looks coldly at the three officers.]

DIMITRI. You needn't wait.

[They bow and withdraw, SHULTZ going last and staring insolently at the PRINCE. He seats himself at table centre. As door shuts, he stares for a moment at it, then suddenly bows his head on his arms in attitude of despair. A knock is heard at the door. DIMITRI leaps to his feet. Enter STRONETZ in civilian attire.]

DIMITRI (eagerly). Stronetz! My God, how glad I am to see you!

STRONETZ. One wouldn't have thought so, judging by the difficulty I had in gaining admission. I had to invent a special order to see you on matter of health. And they made me give up my revolver ; they said it was some new regulation.

DIMITRI (*with a short laugh*). They have taken away every weapon I possess, under some pretext or another. My sword has gone to be reset, my revolver is being cleaned, my hunting-knife has been mislaid.

STRONETZ (*horrified*). My God. DIMITRI ! You don't mean—?

DIMITRI. Yes, I do. I am trapped. Since I came to the throne three years ago as a boy of fourteen I have been watched and guarded against this moment, but it has caught me unawares.

STRONETZ. But your guards !

DIMITRI. Did you notice the uniforms ? The Kranitzki Regiment. They are heart and soul for Prince Karl ; the artillery are equally disaffected. The Andrieff Regiment was the only doubtful factor in their plans, and it marches out to camp tonight. The Lonyadi Regiment comes in to relieve it an hour or so later.

STRONETZ. They are loyal, surely ?

DIMITRI. Yes, but their loyalty will arrive an hour or so too late.

STRONETZ. DIMITRI ! You mustn't stay here to be killed ! You must get out quick !

DIMITRI. My dear good STRONETZ, for more than a generation the Karl faction have been trying to stamp our line out of existence. I am the last of the lot ; do you

suppose that they are going to let me slip out of the claws now ? They're not so damned silly.

STRONETZ. But this is awful ! You sit there and talk if it were a move in a chess game.

DIMITRI (*rising*). Oh, STRONETZ ! If you knew how I hate death ! I'm not a coward, but I do so want to live. Life is so horribly fascinating when one is young, and I have tasted so little of it yet. (*Goes to window.*) Look out the window at that fairyland of mountains with the forests running up and down all over it. You can just see Grovitz where I shot all last autumn, up there on the left, and far away beyond it all is Vienna. Were you ever in Vienna, STRONETZ ? I've only been there once, and it seemed like a magic city to me. And there are other wonderful cities in the world that I've never seen. Oh, I do so want to live. Think of it ; here I am alive and talking to you, as we've talked dozens of times in this grey old room, and tomorrow a fat, stupid servant will be washing up a red stain in that corner—I think it will probably be in that corner.

[*He points to corner near stove, Left.*]

STRONETZ. But you mustn't be butchered in cold blood like this, DIMITRI. If they've left you nothing to fight with I can give you a drug from my case that will bring you a speedy death before they can touch you.

DIMITRI. Thanks, no, old chap. You had better leave before it begins ; they won't touch you. But I won't do myself. I've never seen anyone killed before, and I shall get another opportunity.

STRONETZ. Then I won't leave you ; you can see that

men killed while you are about it.

[A band is heard in distance playing a march.]

DIMITRI. The Andrieff Regiment marching out ! Now they won't waste much time ! *(He draws himself up tense in corner by stove.)* Hush, they are coming !

STRONETZ *(rushing suddenly towards DIMITRI)*. Quick ! An idea ! Tear open your tunic !

[He unfastens DIMITRI'S tunic and appears to be testing his heart. The door swings open and the three officers enter.]

STRONETZ waves a hand commanding silence, and continues his testing. The officers stare at him.]

GIRNITZA. Dr. Stronetz, will you have the goodness to leave the room ? We have some business with His Royal Highness. Urgent business, Dr. Stronetz.

STRONETZ *(facing round)*. Gentlemen, I fear my business is more grave. I have the saddest of duties to perform. I know you would all gladly lay down your lives for your Prince, but there are some perils which even your courage cannot avert.

GIRNITZA *(puzzled)* What are you talking of, sir ?

STRONETZ. The prince sent for me to prescribe for some disquieting symptoms that have declared themselves. I have made my examination. My duty is a cruel one... I cannot give him six days to live !

[DIMITRI sinks into chair near table in pretended collapse. The officers turn to each other, nonplussed.]

GIRNITZA. You are certain ? It is a grave thing you are saying. You are not making any mistake ?

STRONETZ *(laying his hand on DIMITRI'S shoulder)* Would to God I were !

[The officers again turn, whispering to each other.]

GIRNITZA. It seems our business can wait.

VONTIEFF (to DIMITRI). Sire, this is the finger Heaven.

DIMITRI (brokenly). Leave me.

[They salute and slowly withdraw. DIMITRI slowly raises his head, then springs to his feet, rushes to door and listens, then turns round jubilantly to STRONETZ.]

DIMITRI. Spoofed them! Ye gods, that was an inspiration, STRONETZ!

STRONETZ (who stands quietly looking at DIMITRI). That was not altogether an inspiration, Dimitri. A look in your eyes suggested it. I had seen men who were stricken with a mortal disease look like that.

farmer
DIMITRI. Never mind what suggested it, you saved me. The Lonyadi Regiment will be here at this moment and Girnitza's gang daren't risk anything. You've fooled them, Stronetz, you've fooled them.

STRONETZ (sadly). Boy, I haven't fooled them (DIMITRI stares at him for a long moment.) It was a real examination I made while those brutes were waiting there to kill you. It was a real report I made; the man is there.

DIMITRI (slowly). Was it all true, what you told them?

STRONETZ. It was all true. You have not six days to live.

DIMITRI (bitterly). Death has come twice for me in one evening. I'm afraid he must be in earnest. (Passionately.) Why didn't you let them kill me? That was

have been better than this "to-be-left-till-called-for" business. [*Paces across to window (right), and looks out. Turns suddenly.*] STRONETZ ! You offered me a way of escape from a cruel death just now. Let me escape from a crueller one. I am a monarch. I won't be kept waiting by death. Give me that little bottle.

[*Stronetz hesitates, then draws out a small case, extracts bottle and gives it to him.*]

STRONETZ. Four or five drops will do what you ask for.

DIMITRI. Thank you. And now, old friend, good-bye. Go quickly. You've seen me just a little brave—I may not keep it up. I want you to remember me as being brave. Good-bye, best of friends. go.

[*STRONETZ wrings his hands and rushes from the room with his face hidden in his arm. The door shuts. DIMITRI looks for a moment after his friend. Then he goes quickly over to side table and uncorks wine bottle. He is about to pour some wine into a goblet when he pauses as if struck by a new idea. He goes to door, throws it open and listens, then calls, "GIRNITZA ! VONTIEFF ! SHULTZ !". Darting back to the table he pours the entire phial of poison into the wine bottle, and thrusts phial into his pocket. Enter the three officers.*]

DIMITRI (*pouring the wine into four goblets*). The Prince is dead—long live the Prince ! (*He seats himself.*) The old feud must be healed now, there is no one left of my family to keep it on. Prince Karl must succeed. Long life to Prince Karl ! Gentlemen of the Kranitzki Guards, drink to your future sovereign.

[*The three officers drink after glancing at each other.*]

GIRNITZA. Sire, we shall never serve a more gallant Prince than your Royal Highness.

DIMITRI. That is true, because you will never serve another Prince. Observe, I drink fair !

[Drains goblet.]

GIRNITZA. What do you mean, never serve another Prince ?

DIMITRI *(rises)*. I mean that I am going to march into the next world at the head of my Kranitzki Guard. You came in here tonight to kill me. *(They all start)* You found that Death had forestalled you. I thought a pity that the evening should be wasted, so I've killed you, that's all !

SHULTZ. The wine ! He's poisoned us !

[VONTIEFF seizes the bottle and examines it. SHULTZ smells his empty goblet.]

GIRNITZA. Ah ! Poisoned !

[He draws his sword and makes a step towards DIMITRI, who is sitting on the edge of the centre table.]

DIMITRI. Oh, certainly, if you wish it. I'm due to die of disease in a few days and of poison in a minute or two, but if you like to take a little extra trouble about the end, please yourself.

[GIRNITZA reels and drops sword on table and falls back into chair groaning. SHULTZ falls across table and VONTIEFF staggers against wall. At that moment a lively march is heard approaching. DIMITRI seizes the sword and waves it.]

DIMITRI. Aha ! the Lonyadi Regiment marching in. My good loyal Kranitzki Guards shall keep me company into the next world. God save the Prince ! *(Laughs wildly.)* Colonel GIRNITZA, I never thought death...could be...so amusing.

[He falls dying to the ground.]

[CURTAIN]

ONE DARK NIGHT

MARIAN V. HAYES

Characters

JOE, the Inventor

MARY, his wife

JOHNNY, their son

HOB, the blacksmith

Other Men

ONE DARK NIGHT

[The following one-act play tells the story of an inventor, whose ambition was to speed up production and to put an end to child labour. He is misunderstood by the villagers, who think he wants to throw them out of employment.]

People in the play: JOE (*the inventor*), MARY (*his wife*), JHONNY (*their son*), HOB (*the blacksmith*) and OTHER MEN.

SCENE. The kitchen of a poor dwelling. There is a table, a chair, and a couple of stools.

[JOE sits at the table working with bits of stick and string at his machine. By the hearth sits MARY, making a frock for a doll that lies in her lap. The curtains are drawn, and a candle burns on the table...JOE sighs, and passes his hand across his brow.]

MARY. You are tired, Joe. Must you work so late?

JOE. I must, Mary, as you know well. Time is scarce, and I have so much to do.

MARY. I wish you could work by day, like the honest man that you are.

JOE. And get a set of broken bones from my neighbours?

MARY (*shuddering*). Don't say such things!

JOE. You know, it is true. You know that I must work by night, and in secret, if I would keep a whole skin.

MARY. Because folk are foolish.

JOE. Because they are afraid of me, Mary ; afraid that my work will take the bread off their platters, and the milk from their children's lips.

MARY. But you say that your machine will ease their hard work, and bring them more trade and more money.

JOE. It will work several spindles at once. One spinster will be able to produce a hundred threads at the same time...a hundred threads instead of one ! Think of it, Mary !

MARY. I do think...and I wonder...But if the machine does so much, there will be so little work for the people...women and children, Joe, who are busy all day in the cottages at the spinning. They will lose their earnings, and bread is so dear.

JOE. Only for a while, Mary. More spinning will mean more trade, and more work, and more money. Besides, why should the little children work so hard ? Why should they stoop and toil in dark rooms, when they might be playing in the sunshine ?

MARY. Everyone must work, Joe.

JOE. Not little children ! When I was young I worked in a dark cottage all day long. My back grew crooked, and my leg bones bent. My eyes are weak now from peering at the threads. Now the children work in workshops too. They go by at five o'clock on the winter mornings when it is dark and cold, and you hear them coughing and see them shivering.

MARY. Ah ! Poor little things ! I am glad, we have the money to send our Johnny to school.

JOE. Mary, if my machine were set up in the workshops, the children would not have to work so many hours each day. They could sleep longer, and play in the fresh air, and they would grow up strong and hearty, not crooked and pale like me.

MARY. But this is a dream, Joe.

JOE. I shall make it come true.

MARY. The masters would never let the children off work even if your machine could do it quicker for them. Children's work is cheap. And what would the fathers and mothers say if the children could not earn so much, and there was less money in the home ?

JOE. I have told you. They would break my bones. But the boys and girls would be glad.

MARY. What is that ? I thought I heard something.

JOE. Only the wind.

MARY. But Joe, the people are frightened and angry.

JOE. They will thank me for my work one day.

MARY. But I am frightened, too, Joe. I think of Johnny and little Ann asleep upstairs, and I am afraid.

JOE. Poor Mary ! But I must do my work.

MARY. Joe, two days ago I went to Hob, the blacksmith, to have my pattens mended, and he said I was to tell you that the folk were angry.

JOE. He is a big bully, and could crush me like a beetle. But his brain is no bigger than a nut.

MARY. He said they would stop your work.

JOE. Nothing will stop me.

MARY. But suppose they come here, and try to break your machine ?

JOE. There is pistol on the mantelshelf. No one shall touch my machine !

MARY. Joe, why must you do such work ? You lose sleep, and run us all into danger.

JOE. Mary, I must. I can't help it. The ideas grow and struggle in my head, and I must let them out. Besides I hate to see men and women toiling for long hours over work that could be done so much quicker.

MARY. I think it is a pity, Joe. And I love my wheel. I should not like to work with a machine.

JOE. But think, Mary. You could do twenty times the work in half the time—Mark me, the day will come when my machines will be set up in every workshop. The golden guineas will come rolling in for Johnny and little Ann to play with—Johnny shall be a rich man. Ann shall have a wax doll instead of her wooden ball there, and you shall ride in coach, and wear a silk gown every day !

MARY. But that is a fairy tale, Joe !

JOE. No, it is real. Come here, Mary. I want to show you something. (*Mary goes to him.*) Do you see this tiny pointed piece ?

MARY. Yes, Joe. What is it ?

JOE. It is the most important part of my machine. It took me weeks to think it out, and months to make it. Twelve times I have tried it, and each time it has snapped under the strain. I am going to try it once more to-night...Perhaps...I don't know...it may work.

MARY. Oh, I hope so, Joe !

JOE. It is the secret heart of my machine. Without it the whole thing is useless. Now watch ! I am going to fit it into place.

MARY. Oh, Joe, will it be finished then ?

JOE. Enough for me to know if all my years of work have been wasted, or if I must start all over again.

MARY. Can I help you ?

JOE. Give me a thread from your wheel.

[*Mary gives Joe a length of thread.*]

JOE. Put your fingers there. Now pull it tight. Hold it.

[*There is a clicking noise.*]

MARY (*in a whisper*). It works ! It works, Joe !

JOE. Mary ! I have won !

MARY. Oh, I am glad, Joe ! But what will happen to us ?

[*A voice is heard calling 'Mother ! Father !'*]

MARY. Why, Johnny, you should be asleep ! What do you want, lad ?

[*In comes Johnny, in his shirt and trousers, with a sleepy look on his face.*]

JOHNNY. Father, there are men in the yard...I saw their shadows, and heard them whispering.

MARY. Johnny ! Are you sure ?

JOHNNY. Certain, sure. What do they want, Father ? What do they mean by it ?

JOE. Mischief ! That is what they mean. They want to smash me, and my work.

MARY. Johnny, run and fetch the watch.

JOE. It is too late, Mary. They would never let him pass. And no one could get here in time.

JOHNNY. What shall we do Father ?

JOE. Give me my pistol from the mantelshelf...They shall not touch my machine !

MARY. No, Joe, you are not strong. Get to bed and let me speak to them.

JOE. Like a coward !

MARY. Like a wise man. Johnny, go back to the window, and shout down if you see them coming.

[Johnny runs out.]

JOE. I am staying here, Mary.

[JOE gets up, and staggers.]

MARY. No, no ! You are tired and ill. Get to bed. Give me the secret part. I'll hide it in the chimney.

JOE. They would look there first.

MARY. Where then ?...I know...Inside little Ann's wooden baby. The head is loose. They will never think to find it there.

[She puts the part inside the doll, and leaves the doll on a chair.]

JOE. That is a grand idea, Mary. But I am staying.

MARY. For the children's sake, Joe !...For the sake of your work. If harm befell you, no one could go on with it.

[Johnny comes running in.]

JOHNNY. They are coming, Father !

MARY. Come, Joe ! Quick !

[*They go to the door, MARY helping him. A stone flies through the window. There is a tinkle of breaking glass.*]

MARY. Come, Joe ! Quick !

[*MARY runs to the mantelshelf, seizes the pistol, and puts it into JOHNNY's hands.*]

MARY. Keep them back with that, Johnny. It is not loaded, but they will not know. Keep them till your father is abed, and I can come to you.

[*JOE and MARY go out. JOHNNY holds back the curtain, and points the pistol through the window...There is an angry shout, and a fist flourishing a stick, appears between the curtains.*]

JOHNNY. Keep back ! Do you think I am afraid of you ?

[*There is a thunderous knocking on the door. MARY comes running in, and goes to JOHNNY.*]

MARY. Neighbours ! Neighbours ! What do you want ! We have done no harm !

[*The door is flung open, and several men tramp in. They carry sticks, and one, HOB, has a hammer.*]

HOB. Give that thing to me !

[*HOB snatches the pistol out of JOHNNY's hand.*]

HOB. Now, where is your husband, mistress ?

MARY. In his bed. He is sick, and weary. You would not harm him.

HOB. We are going to smash his evil work...Where is it ?

2nd man. On the table yonder.

HOB. Then here is an end of it !

[HOB heaves up his hammer, and smashes the model.]
MARY screams. JHONNY rushes at him, but HOB pushes him over with one hand.]

HOB. And now for your husband !

MARY. Neighbours, he is a sick man and almost cripple. You would not hurt him !

HOB. He is planning to take away our daily bread. We will show him what we think of him and his way.

MARY. You have broken his machine... You have done enough... We have children...

HOB. So have we... and he means to steal their work...

JOHNNY. My father says young children should work.

HOB. Your father is mad... Take care you do not follow in his ways.

2nd man. Why should he plot to take other men's livings from them ?

JOHNNY. No ! No ! He means to help. My Father is a good man, and brave and clever. Whatever you do, you will not stop his work !

HOB. We shall see... Where is he ?

[HOB goes towards the door... MARY claps her hands.]
JOHNNY'S mouth.]

MARY. Don't listen to the boy ! We will go away to another place. Only leave us in peace !

HOB. The boy is a young scamp and idler. I will teach him right with a strap if I had my way.

2ND MAN. We have done what we set out to do,
JOB ! We don't want trouble with the watch...Let them
o.

HOB. Go then, and leave honest folk to their honest
work. If you are here this time next week we will come
and burn you out !...Come !

[The men go out.]

MARY. My poor lad ! How brave you were ! Let
me rub your head with lard.

JOHNNY. Oh mother ! Father's work is all spoiled !

MARY. No, here is the secret, the most important
part. I have saved it.

*[MARY takes it out of the doll, and shows it to
JOHNNY.]*

MARY. He will build it up again when we get to
some peaceful place.

JOHNNY. Mother, why won't he rest, and let such
dangerous things alone ?

MARY. Because he is a great man, Johnny. He will
not give in, and his work will bring riches and happiness
to thousands of people. You will live to see your father's
name honoured, and his machines working in every work-
shop...and you will be proud to think that you helped
save it one dark night.

JOHNNY. Here is Father, Mother !

[In comes Joe.]

JOE. Have you got it, Mary ?

MARY. The part ? Yes, Joe, here.

JOE. Give it to me, and get you back to bed. I'll
need a candle. The fire will give me light enough.

MARY. Joe ! What do you mean ?

JOE. They will not come back to-night...]
begin again...

*(He sits down, and begins to gather up the
pieces.)*

[The Curtain falls.]

IF I WERE YOU

DOUGLAS JAMES

Characters

GERRARD

INTRUDER

IF I WERE YOU

[The scene is a small cottage interior. There is an entrance back right (which may be curtains). Another door to the left must be a practical door. The furniture is simple, consisting of a small table towards the left, a chair or two, and a divan rather up-stage on the right. On the table is a telephone.]

When the curtain rises GERRARD is standing by the table, 'phoning. He is of medium height, and wears horn-rimmed glasses...He is dressed in a lounge suit and a great coat. His voice is cultured.]

GERRARD.....Well, tell him to 'phone up directly. I must know. Yes, I expect I'll still be here, but you mustn't count on that...In about ten minutes' time. Right-ho. Good-bye.

[He puts down the 'phone and goes to the divan on the left, where there is a travelling bag, and starts packing. Whilst he is thus engaged, another man, similar in build to GERRARD, enters from the right silently—revolver in hand. He is flashily dressed in an overcoat and a soft hat. He bumps accidentally against the table, and at the sound, GERRARD turns quickly.]

GERRARD (pleasantly). Why, this is a surprise, Mr.—er—

INTRUDER. I'm glad you're pleased to see me. I

don't think you'll be pleased for long. Put those paws up!

GERRARD. This is all very melodramatic ; not very original, perhaps, but—

INTRUDER. Trying to be calm and—er—

GERRARD. "Nonchalant" is your word, I think.

INTRUDER. Thanks a lot. You'll soon stop being smart. I'll make you crawl. I want to know a few things, see.

GERRARD. Anything you like. I know all the answers. But before we begin I should like to change my position: you may be comfortable, but I am not.

INTRUDER. Sit down there, and no funny business. (*Motions to chair, and seats himself on the divan by the bag.*) Now then, we'll have a nice little talk about yourself !

GERRARD. At last a sympathetic audience ! I'll tell you the story of my life. How as a child I was stolen by the gypsies, and why at the age of thirty-two, I find myself in my lonely Essex cottage, how—

INTRUDER. Keep it to yourself, and just answer my questions. You live here alone ? Well, do you ?

GERRARD. I'm sorry. I thought you were telling me, not asking me. A question of inflexion ; your voice is—unfamiliar.

INTRUDER (*with emphasis*). Do you live here alone ?

GERRARD. And if I don't answer ?

INTRUDER. You've got enough sense not to want to get hurt.

GERRARD. I think good sense is shown more in the ability to avoid pain than in the mere desire to do so.

What do you think, Mr.—er——

INTRUDER. Never mind my name. I like yours better, Mr. Gerrard. What are your Christian names?

GERRARD. Vincent Charles.

INTRUDER. Do you run a car?

GERRARD. No.

INTRUDER. That's a lie. You're not dealing with a pol. I'm as smart as you and smarter, and I know you run a car. Better be careful, wise guy!

GERRARD. Are you American, or is that merely a clever imitation?

INTRUDER. Listen, this gun's no toy. I can hurt you without killing you, and still get my answers.

GERRARD. Of course, if you put it like that, I'll be glad to assist you. I do possess a car, and it's in the garage round the corner.

INTRUDER. That's better. Do people often come out here?

GERRARD. Very rarely. Surprisingly few people take the trouble to visit me. There's the baker and the green-grocer, of course; and then there's the milkman—quite harmless, but no one so interesting as yourself.

INTRUDER. I happen to know that you never see trades-people.

GERRARD. You seem to have taken a considerable amount of trouble. Since you know so much about me, won't you say something about yourself? You have been so modest.

INTRUDER. I could tell you plenty. You think you're smart, but I'm the top of the class round here. I've got

brains and I use them. That's how I've got where I be

GERRARD. And where precisely have you got? I didn't require a great brain to break into my cottage.

INTRUDER. When you know why I've broken into your little cottage, you'll be surprised, and it won't be a pleasant surprise.

GERRARD. With you figuring so largely in it, that's understandable. By the way, what particular line of crime do you embrace, or aren't you a specialist?

INTRUDER. My speciality's jewel robbery. Your cottage will do me a treat. It's certainly a dandy bus.

GERRARD. I'm afraid, jewels are few and far between in the wilds of Essex.

INTRUDER. (So are the cops. I can retire here now for a little while.)

GERRARD. You mean to live with me? A trap, sudden, isn't it; you've not been invited.

INTRUDER. You won't be here long, so I didn't trouble to ask.

GERRARD. What do you mean?

INTRUDER. This is your big surprise. I'm going to kill you.

GERRARD. A little harsh, isn't it?

INTRUDER (*with heavy sarcasm*). Yeah. I'll be surprised to do it. I've taken a fancy to you, but it's just got to be done.

GERRARD. Why add murder to your other crimes? It's a grave step you're taking.

INTRUDER. I'm not taking it for fun. I've been

hunted long enough. I'm wanted for murder already, and they can't hang me twice.

GERRARD. You're planning a gratuitous double, so to speak. Admitted you've nothing to lose, but what have you to gain ?

INTRUDER. I've got freedom to gain. As for myself, I'm a poor hunted rat. As Vincent Charles Gerrard I'm free to go to places and do things. I can eat well and sleep well without having to be ready to beat it at the sight of a cop.

GERRARD. In most melodramas the villain is foolish enough to delay his killing long enough to be frustrated. You are much luckier.

INTRUDER. I'm O.K. I've got a reason for everything. I'm going to be Vincent Charles Gerrard, see. I've got to know what he talks like. Now I know. That posh stuff comes easy. This is Mr. V. C. Gerrard speaking. (*Pantomime of 'phoning, in imitation cultured voice.*) And that's not all. (*He stands up.*) Get up a minute. (*GERRARD stands.*) Now take a look at me.

GERRARD. You're not particularly decorative.

INTRUDER. No ! Well, that goes for you, too. I've only got to wear specs and I'll be enough like you to get away with it.

GERRARD. What about your clothes ? They'll let you down if you're not careful.

INTRUDER. That'll be all right. Yours will fit me fine.

GERRARD. This is extremely interesting, but you seem to miss the point of my remark. I said, you were luckier

than most melodramatic villains. It was not a tribute to your intelligence. You won't kill me for a very good reason.)

INTRUDER. So that's what you think.

GERRARD. You'll let me go, and thank God you didn't shoot sooner.

INTRUDER. Come on. What's on your mind ! Better be quick. This conversation bores me.

GERRARD. Your idea is to elude the police by killing me and taking on my identity ?

INTRUDER. Yes, I like the idea.

GERRARD. But are you sure it's going to help you ?

INTRUDER. (Now listen here. I've got this all planned. I did a job in town. Things went wrong and I plugged a cop. Since then I've done nothing but dodge.

GERRARD. And this is where dodging has brought you ?

INTRUDER. It brought me to Aylesbury. That's where I saw you in the car. Two other people saw you and started to talk. I listened. It looks like you're a bit queer kind of a mystery man.

GERRARD. A mystery which I propose to explain.

INTRUDER (*disregarding him*). You 'phone your orders and sometimes you go away suddenly, and come back just the same. Those are just the things I want to do. Hearing about you was one of my luckiest breaks.

GERRARD. Apparently you haven't the intelligence to ask why I am invested in this cloak of mystery.

INTRUDER (*preparing to shoot*). As I said before, this conversation bores me.

GERRARD. Don't be a fool. If you shoot, you'll hang for sure. If not as yourself, then as Vincent Charles Gerrard.

INTRUDER. What is this ?

GERRARD. This is your big surprise. I said you wouldn't kill me and I was right. Why do you think I am here today and gone tomorrow, never see trades-people ? You say my habits would suit you. You are a crook. Do you think I am a Sunday-school teacher ?

INTRUDER. You may be a liar.

GERRARD. Listen. The game's up as far as I'm concerned. Things went wrong with me. I said it with bullets and got away. Unfortunately they got one of my men, and found things the fool should have burnt. Tonight I'm expecting trouble. My bag's packed ready to clear off. There it is.

INTRUDER. It's a bag all right, and this is a gun all right. What's all this ?

GERRARD. That's a disguise outfit ; false moustaches and what-not. Now do you believe me ?

INTRUDER (*musingly*). I don't know.

GERRARD. For God's sake clear that muddled head of yours and let's go. Come with me in the car ; I can use you. If you find it's a fake, you've got me in the car, and you've still got your gun.

INTRUDER. May be you're right.

GERRARD. Then don't waste time. (*Goes and picks up hat and bag.*)

INTRUDER. Careful, boss, I'm watching you.

GERRARD. I've got a man posted on the main road.

He'll ring up if he sees the police, but I don't want to leave it as late as that. (*Telephone bell rings.*) Come. They're after us. Through here straight to the garage.

INTRUDER. How do I know that ?

GERRARD. Oh, don't be a fool. Look for yourself. (*GERRARD opens door and steps away. INTRUDER leans forward to inspect it, with his side to the door. GERRARD, but with revolver ready. As he turns his head, GERRARD gives him a push into the cupboard, knocking the revolver out of his hand. He slams the door, and INTRUDER picks up the revolver, and goes to the 'phone, where he stands with the gun pointed at the cupboard.*) INTRUDER rattles door and shouts, "Let me out of here. Hallo. Yes, speaking. Sorry I can't let you have the props in time for rehearsal. I've had a spot of bother, but quite amusing. I think, I'll put it in my next play. I can you tell our friend the Sergeant to come up here once. You'll probably find him in the Public Bar."

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

NORMAN MCKINNEL

Characters

THE BISHOP

THE CONVICT

PERSOME (the Bishop's sister, a widow)

MARIE

SERGEANT OF GENDARMES

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

SCENE. *The kitchen of the BISHOP'S cottage. It is plainly but substantially furnished. Doors R. and L. and L.C. Window R.C. Fireplace with heavy mantel-piece down R. Oak settle with cushions behind door L.C. Table in window R.C. with writing materials and crucifix (wood). Eight-day clock R. of window. Kitchen dresser with cupboard to lock down L. Oak dining table R.C. Chairs, books, etc. Winter wood scene without. On the mantel-piece are two very handsome candlesticks which look strangely out of place with their surroundings.*

[MARIE and PERSOME discovered. MARIE stirring some soup on the fire. PERSOME laying the cloth, etc.]

PERSOME. Marie, isn't the soup boiling yet ?

MARIE. Not yet, madam.

PERSOME. Well, it ought to be. You haven't tended the fire properly, child.

MARIE. But, madam, you yourself made the fire up.

PERSOME. Don't answer me back like that. It is rude.

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. Then don't let me have to rebuke you again.

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOME. I wonder where my brother can be. *(Looking at the clock.)* It is after eleven o'clock and no sign of him. Marie !

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. Did Monseigneur the Bishop leave any message for me ?

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOME. Did he tell you where he was going ?

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. 'Yes, madam' (*imitating*). Then why haven't you told me, stupid !

MARIE. Madam didn't ask me.

PERSOME. But there is no reason for your not telling me, is it ?

MARIE. Madam said only this morning I was not to chatter, so I thought—

PERSOME. Ah, mon Dieu, you thought ! Ah ! It is hopeless.

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. Don't keep saying 'Yes, madam', like a parrot, nincompoop.

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOME. Well. Where did Monseigneur say he was going ?

MARIE. To my mother's, madam.

PERSOME. To your mother's indeed ! And why, pray ?

MARIE. Monseigneur asked me how she was, and I told him she was feeling poorly.

PERSOME. You told him she was feeling poorly, did you ? And so my brother is to be kept out of his bed, and go without his supper because you told him she was feeling poorly. There's gratitude for you !

MARIE. Madam, the soup is boiling.

PERSOME. Then pour it out, fool and don't chatter.
(*Marie about to do so.*) No, no ; not like that. Here, let me do it, and do you put the salt-cellars on the table—the silver ones.

MARIE. The silver ones, madam ?

PERSOME. Yes, the silver ones. Are you deaf as well as stupid ?

MARIE. They are sold, madam.

PERSOME. Sold ! (*With horror.*) Sold ! Are you mad ? Who sold them ? Why were they sold ?

MARIE. Monseigneur the Bishop told me this afternoon while you were out to take them to Monseigneur Gervais, who has often admired them, and sell them for as much as I could.

PERSOME. But you had no right to do so without asking me.

MARIE (*with awe*). But, madam, Monseigneur the Bishop told me.

PERSOME. Monseigneur the Bishop is a-ahem ! But—but what can he have wanted with the money ?

MARIE. Pardon, madam, but I think it was for Mere Gringoire.

PERSOME. Mere Gringoire, indeed ! Mere Gringoire ! What, the old witch who lives at the top of the hill, and who says she is bed-ridden because she is too lazy to do any work ? And what did Mere Gringoire want with the money, pray ?

MARIE. Madam, it was for the rent. The bailiff would not wait any longer, and threatened to turn her out today if it were not paid; so she sent little Jean to Monseigneur

to ask for help, and—

PERSOME. Oh, mon Dieu ! It is hopeless, hopeless. We shall have nothing left. His estate is sold, his savings have gone. His furniture, everything. Were it not for my little dot we should starve ! And now my beautiful—beautiful (*sob*) salt-cellars. Ah, it is too much, too much. (*She breaks down crying.*)

MARIE. Madam, I am sorry, if I had known—

PERSOME. Sorry, and why, pray ? If Monseigneur the Bishop chooses to sell his salt-cellars he may do so, I suppose. Go and wash your hands, they are disgracefully dirty.

MARIE. Yes, madam (*going towards R.*).

[*Enter the BISHOP, C.*]

BISHOP. Ah ! how nice and warm it is in here ! It is worth going out in the cold for the sake of the comfort of coming in.

[*PERSOME has hastened to help him off with his coat, etc. MARIE has dropped a deep curtsy.*]

Thank you, dear. (*Looking at her.*) Why, what is the matter ? You have been crying. Has Marie been troublesome, eh ? (*Shaking his finger at her.*) Ah !

PERSOME. No, it wasn't Marie—but, but—

BISHOP. Well, well, you shall tell me presently. Marie, my child, run home now ; your mother is better. I have prayed with her and the doctor has been there. Run home ! (*Marie putting on cloak and going.*) And, Marie, let yourself in quietly in case your mother is asleep.

MARIE. Oh, thanks, thanks, Monseigneur.

[*She goes to door C., as it opens, the snow drives in.*]

BISHOP. Here, Marie, take my comforter, it will keep you warm. It is very cold to-night.

MARIE. Oh, no, Monseigneur ! (*Shamefacedly.*)

PERSOME. What nonsense, brother, she is young, she won't hurt.

BISHOP. Ah, Persome you have not been out, you don't know how cold it has become. Here, Marie, let me put it on for you. (*Does so.*) There ! Run along, little one.

[*Exit MARIE, C.*]

PERSOME. Brother, I have no patience with you. There, sit down and take your soup, it has been waiting ever so long. If it is spoilt, it serves you right.

BISHOP. It smells delicious.

PERSOME. I'm sure, Marie's mother is not so ill that you need have stayed out on such a night as this. I believe those people *pretend* to be ill just to have the Bishop call on them. They have no thought of the Bishop !

BISHOP. It is kind of them to want to see me.

PERSOME. Well, for my part, I believe that charity begins at home.

BISHOP. And so you make me this delicious soup. You are very good to me, sister.

PERSOME. Good to you, yes ! I should think so, I should like to know where you would be without me to look after you. The dupe of every idle scamp or lying old woman in the parish.

BISHOP. If people lie to me they are poorer, not I.

PERSOME. But it is ridiculous ; you will soon have

nothing left. You give away everything, everything!!!

BISHOP. My dear, there is so much suffering in the world, and I can do so little (*sighs*), so very little.

PERSOME. Suffering, yes ; but you never think of the suffering you cause to those who love you best, the suffering you cause to me.

BISHOP (*rising*). You, sister dear ? Have I hurt you. Ah, I remember, you had been crying. Was it my fault. I didn't mean to hurt you. I am sorry.

PERSOME. Sorry. Yes. Sorry won't mend it. Humph. Oh, do go on eating your soup before it gets cold.

BISHOP. Very well, dear (*sits*). But tell me—

PERSOME. You are like a child, I can't trust you of my sight. No sooner is my back turned than you get that little minx Marie to sell the silver salt-cellars.

BISHOP. Ah, yes the salt-cellars. It is a pity. You were proud of them ?

PERSOME. Proud of them, why, they have been in the family for years.

BISHOP. Yes, it is a pity. They were beautiful ; but still, dear, one can eat salt out of china just as well.

PERSOME. Yes, or meat off the floor, I suppose. Oh, it's coming to that. And as for that old wretch, Marie Gringoire, I wonder she had the audacity to send me back again. The last time I saw her I gave her such a talking to that it ought to have had some effect.

BISHOP. Yes ! I offered to take her in here for a day or two, but she seemed to think it might distress you.

PERSOME. Distress me !

BISHOP. And the bailiff, who is a very just man

would not wait longer for the rent, so—so, you see I *had* to pay it.

PERSOME. *You had to pay it. (Gesture of comic despair.)*

BISHOP. Yes, and you see I had no money; so I had to dispose of the salt-cellars. It was fortunate I had them, wasn't it ? *(Smiling.)* But I'm sorry, I have grieved you.

PERSOME. Oh, go on ! go on ! you are *incorrigible* *out of control*. You'll sell your candlesticks next.

BISHOP *(with real concern)*. No, no, sister, not my candlesticks.

PERSOME. Oh ! Why not ? They would pay somebody's rent, I suppose.

BISHOP. Ah, you are good, sister, to think of that ; but—but I don't want to sell them. You see, dear, my mother gave them to me on—on her death-bed, just after you were born, and—and she asked me to keep them in remembrance of her; so I would like to keep them, but perhaps it is a sin to set such store by them ?

PERSOME. Brother, brother, you will break my heart *(with tears in her voice)*. There ! don't say anything more. Kiss me and give me your blessing. I'm going to bed.
[*They kiss.*]

[*Bishop makes the sign of the Cross and murmurs a blessing. PERSOME locks cupboard door and turns to go.*]

PERSOME. Don't sit up too long and tire your eyes.

BISHOP. No, dear ! Good night !

[*PERSOME exits R.*]

BISHOP *(comes to table and opens a book, then looks up at the candlesticks.)*. They would pay somebody's rent.

It was kind of her to think of that.

[*He stirs the fire, trims the lamp, arranges some books and papers, sits down, is restless, shivers slightly; clock outside strikes twelve and he settles to read. Music during this. Enter the CONVICT stealthily; he has a long knife and seizes the BISHOP from behind.*]

CONVICT. If you call out you are a dead man !

BISHOP. But, my friend, as you see, I am reading. Why should I call out ? Can I help you in any way ?

CONVICT (*hoarsely*). I want food. I'm starving, haven't eaten anything for three days. Give me food quickly, quickly, curse you.

BISHOP (*eagerly*). But certainly, my son, you shall have food. I will ask my sister for the keys of the cupboard.

[*Rising*]

CONVICT. Sit down !!! (*The BISHOP sits, smiling.*)

None of that, my friend ! I'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff. You would ask your sister for the keys, would you ? A likely story ! You would rouse the house too, Eh ? Ha ! Ha ! A good joke truly. Come, where is the food ? I want no keys. I have a wolf inside me tearing at my entrails, tearing me ; quick, tell me where the food is.

BISHOP (*aside*). I wish Persome would not lock the cup-board. (*Aloud*) Come, my friend, you have nothing to fear. My sister and I are alone here.

CONVICT. How do I know that ?

BISHOP. Why, I have just told you.

[*CONVICT looks long at the BISHOP.*]

CONVICT. Humph ! I'll risk it. (*Bishop, going to*

R.) But mind ! Play me false and, as sure as there are devils in hell, I'll drive my knife through your heart. I have nothing to lose.

BISHOP. You have your soul to lose, my son ; it is of more value than my heart. (*At door R. calling.*) Persome ! Persome !

[*The CONVICT stands behind him with his knife ready.*]
PERSOME (*within*). Yes, brother.

BISHOP. Here is a poor traveller who is hungry. If you are not undressed, will you come and open the cupboard and I will give him some supper.

PERSOME (*within*). What, at this time of night ? A pretty business truly. Are we to have no sleep now, but to be at the beck and call of every ne'er-do-well who happens to pass ?

BISHOP. But, Persome, the traveller is hungry.

PERSOME. Oh, very well, I am coming. (PERSOME enters R. Sees the knife in the CONVICT's hand. Frightened.) Brother, what is he doing with that knife ?

BISHOP. The knife—oh, well, you see, dear, perhaps he may have thought that I—I had sold ours.

[*Laughs gently.*]

PERSOME. Brother, I am frightened. He glares at us like a wild beast (*aside to him*).

CONVICT. Hurry, I tell you. Give me food or I'll stick my knife in you both and help myself.

BISHOP. Give me the keys, Persome, (*she gives them to him*) and now, dear, you may go to bed.

[PERSOME going. The CONVICT springs in front of her.]

CONVICT. Stop ! Neither of you leave this room till I do.

[*She looks at the BISHOP.*]

BISHOP. Persome, will you favour this gentleman with your company at supper ? He evidently desires it.

PERSOME. Very well, brother.

[*She sits down at the table staring at the two.*]

BISHOP. Here is some cold pie and a bottle of wine and some bread.

CONVICT. Put them on the table, and stand below it so that I can see you.

[*BISHOP does so and opens drawer in table, taking out knife and fork, looking at the knife in CONVICT'S hand.*]

CONVICT. My knife is sharp. (*He runs his finger along the edge and looks at them meaningly.*) And as for forks (*taking it up*) faugh ! steel. (*He throws it away.*) We don't use forks in prison.

PERSOME. Prison ?

CONVICT (*cutting off an enormous slice, which he tears with his fingers like an animal. Then starts.*). What was that ? (*He looks at the door.*) Why the devil do you leave the window unshuttered and the door unbarred so that anyone can come in ? (*Shutting them.*)

BISHOP. That is why they are left open.

CONVICT. Well, they are shut now !

BISHOP (*sighs*). For the first time in thirty years.

[*CONVICT eats voraciously and throws a bone on the floor.*]

PERSOME. Oh, my nice clean floor !

CC-0. Prof. Satya Vrat Shastri Collection.

[BISHOP *picks up the bone and puts it on plate.*]

CONVICT. You're afraid of thieves ?

BISHOP. I am sorry for them.

CONVICT. Sorry for them. Ha ! ha ! ha ! (*Drinks from bottle.*) That's a good one. Sorry for them. Ha ! ha ! ha ! (*Drinks.*) (*Suddenly*) What the devil are you ?

BISHOP. I am a Bishop.

CONVICT. Ha ! ha ! ha ! A bishop. Holy virgin, a bishop. Well, I'm damned !

BISHOP. I hope you may escape that, my son. Persome, you may leave us ; this gentleman will excuse you.

PERSOME. Leave you with—

BISHOP. Please ! My friend and I can talk more—
freely then.

[*By this time, owing to his starving condition, the wine has affected the* CONVICT.]

CONVICT. What's that ? Leave us. Yes, yes, leave us. Good night. I want to talk to the Bishop. The Bishop. Ha ! ha !

[*Laughs as he drinks and coughs.*]

BISHOP. Good night, Persome.

[*He holds the door open and she goes out R., holding in her skirts as she passes the* CONVICT.]

CONVICT (*chuckling to himself*). The Bihsop. Ha ha ! Well, I'm—(*Suddenly very loudly.*) D'you know what I am ?

BISHOP. I think one who has suffered much.

CONVICT. (*Suffered ? (puzzled) suffered ?*) My God, yes. (*Drinks.*) But that's long time ago. Ha ! ha !
That was when I was a man. Now I'm not a man ; now

I'm a number ; number 15729, and I've lived in hell for ten years.

BISHOP. Tell me about it—about hell.

CONVICT. Why ? (*Suspiciously.*) Do you want to tell the police—to set them on my track ?

BISHOP. No ! I will not tell the police.

CONVICT (*looks at him earnestly*). I believe you (*scratching his head*), but damn me if I know why.

BISHOP (*laying his hand on the CONVICT's arm*). Tell me about the time—the time before you went to—hell.

CONVICT. It's so long ago I forgot, but I had a little cottage. There were vines growing on it. (*Dreamily.*) They looked pretty with the evening sun on them and, and—there was a woman—she was (*thinking hard*)—she must have been my wife—yes. (*Suddenly and very rapidly.*) Yes, I remember ! she was ill; we had no food; I could get no work; it was a bad year; and my wife, my Jeanette, was ill, dying (*pause*); so I stole to buy her food. (*Long pause.* *The BISHOP gently pats his hand.*) They caught me. I pleaded to them; I told them why I stole; but they laughed at me; and I was sentenced to ten years in the prison hulks; (*pause*) ten years in hell. The night I was sentenced, the gaoler told me—told me, Jeanette was dead. (*Sobs with fury.*) Ah, damn them, God curse them all.

[*He sinks on the table, sobbing.*]

BISHOP. Now tell me about the prison-ship, about hell.

CONVICT. Tell you about it ? Look here, I was a man once. I'm a beast now, and they made me what I am. They chained me up like a wild animal, they lashed me like a hound. I fed on filth, I was covered with vermin.

I slept on boards, and I complained. Then they lashed me again. For ten years, ten years. Oh God ! They took away my name, they took away my soul, and they gave me a devil in its place. But one day they were careless, one day they forgot to chain up their wild beast, and he escaped. He was free. That was six weeks ago. I was free, free, to starve.

BISHOP. To starve ?

CONVICT. Yes, to starve. They feed you in hell, but when you escape from it, you starve. They were hunting me everywhere and I had no passport, no name. So I stole again, I stole these rags, I stole my food daily, I slept in the woods, in barns, anywhere. I dare not ask for work, I dare not go into a town to beg, so I stole, and they have made me what I am, they have made me a thief. God curse them all.

[Empties the bottle and throws into the fire-place R., smashing it.]

BISHOP. My son, you have suffered much but there is hope for all.

CONVICT. Hope ! Hope ! Ha ! ha ! ha !

[Laughs wildly.]

BISHOP. You have walked far ; you are tired. Lie down and sleep on the couch there, and I will get you some coverings.

CONVICT. And if anyone comes ?

BISHOP. No one will come ; but if they do, are you not my friend ?

CONVICT. Your friend (puzzled) ?

BISHOP. They will not molest the Bishop's friend.

CONVICT. The Bishop's friend !

[*Scratching his head, utterly puzzled.*]

BISHOP. I will get the coverings.

[*Exit L.*]

CONVICT (*looks after him, scratches his head*). The Bishop's friend ! (*He goes to fire to warm himself and notices the candlesticks. He looks round to see if he is alone, and takes them down, weighing them.*) Silver, by God, heavy. What a prize !

[*He hears the BISHOP coming, and in his haste drops one candlestick on the table.*]

[*Enters the BISHOP.*]

BISHOP (*sees what is going on, but goes to the settle up L., with coverings*). Ah, you are admiring my candlesticks. I am proud of them. They were a gift from my mother. A little too handsome for this poor cottage perhaps, but all I have to remind me of her. Your bed is ready. Will you lie down now ?

CONVICT. Yes, yes, I'll lie down now. (*Puzzled.*) Look here, why the devil are you—ki—kind to me ? (*Suspiciously.*) What do you want ? Eh ?

BISHOP. I want you to have a good sleep, my friend.

CONVICT. I believe, you want to convert me; save my soul, don't you call it ? Well, it's no good, see ? I don't want any damned religion, and as for the Church, bah ! I hate the Church.

BISHOP. That is a pity, my son, as the Church does not hate you.

CONVICT. You are going to try to convert me. Oh ! Ha ! ha ! that's a good idea. Ha ! ha ! ha ! No, no,

Monseigneur the Bishop. I don't want any of your Faith, Hope, and Charity, see ? So, anything you do for me, you're doing to the devil, understand (*defiantly*) ?

BISHOP. One must do a great deal for the devil, in order to do a little for God.

CONVICT (*angrily*). I don't want any damned religion, I tell you.

BISHOP. Won't you lie down now, it is late ?

CONVICT (*grumbling*). Well, all right, but I won't be preached at, I—I—(*On couch*). You're sure, no one will come ?

BISHOP. I don't think they will ; but if they do you yourself have locked the door.

CONVICT. Humph ! I wonder if it's safe. (*He goes to the door and tries it, then turns and sees the BISHOP holding the covering, annoyed.*) Here ! you go to bed. I'll cover myself. (*The BISHOP hesitates.*) Go on, I tell you.

BISHOP. Good night, my son.

[*Exit L.*]

[CONVICT waits till he is off, then tries the BISHOP'S door.]

CONVICT. No lock, of course. (Curse it. Looks round and sees the candlesticks again.) Humph ! I'll have another look at them. (*He takes them up and toys with them.*) Worth hundreds, I'll warrant. If I had these turned into money, they'd start me fair. Humph ! The old boy's fond of them too, said his mother gave him them. His mother, yes. They didn't think of *my* mother when they sent me to hell. He was kind to me too—but, what's a Bishop for

except to be kind to you? Here, cheer up, my heart, you're getting soft. God! wouldn't my chainmates laugh to see 15729 hesitating about collaring the plunder because he felt good. Good! Ha! ha! Oh! my God! Good! Ha! ha! 15729 getting soft. That's a good one. Ha! ha! No, I'll take his candlesticks and go. If I stay here he'll preach at me in the morning and I'll get soft. Damn him and his preaching too. Here goes!

[He takes the candlesticks, stows them in his coat, cautiously exits L.C. As he does so the door slams.]

PERSOME (*without*). Who's there? Who's there, I say? Am I to get no sleep tonight? Who's there, I say? (*Enters R. PERSOME*) I'm sure I heard the door shut. (*Looking round.*) No one here? (*Knocks at the BISHOP'S door L. Sees the candlesticks have gone.*) The candlesticks, the candlesticks. They are gone. Brother, brother, come out. Fire, murder, thieves!

[Enters BISHOP L.]

BISHOP. What is it, dear, what is it? What is the matter?

PERSOME. He has gone. The man with the hungry eyes has gone, and he has taken your candlesticks.

BISHOP. Not my candlesticks, sister, surely not those. (*He looks and sighs.*) Ah, that is hard, very hard, I, I--He might have left me those. They were all I had (*almost breaking down.*).

PERSOME. Well, but go and inform the police. He can't have gone far. They will soon catch him, and you'll get the candlesticks back again. You don't deserve them, though, leaving them about with a man like that in the house.

BISHOP. You are right, Persome. It was my fault. I led him into temptation.

PERSOME. Oh, nonsense ! Led him into temptation, indeed ! The man is a thief, common scoundrelly thief. I knew it the moment I saw him. Go and inform the police or I will.

[*Going, but he stops her.*]

BISHOP. And have him sent back to prison (*very softly*), sent back to hell ! No, Persome. It is a just punishment for me ; I set too great store by them. It was a sin. My punishment is just, but, oh God, it is hard, it is very hard.

[*He buries his head in his hands.*]

PERSOME. No, brother, you are wrong. If you won't tell the police, I will not stand by and see you robbed. I know you are my brother and my Bishop, and the best man in all France, but you are a fool, I tell you, a child, and I will not have your goodness abused. I shall go and inform the police. (*Going.*)

BISHOP. Stop, Persome. The candlesticks were mine, they are *his* now. It is better so. He had more need of them than I. My mother would have wished it so had she been here.

PERSOME. But—

[*Great knocking without.*]

SERGEANT (*without*). Monseigneur, Monseigneur, we have something for you. May we enter ?

BISHOP. Enter, my son.

[*Enter SERGEANT and three GENDARMES with CONVICT bound. The SERGEANT carries the candlesticks.*]

PERSOME. Ah, so they have caught you, villain, have they ?

SERGEANT. Yes, madam, we found this scoundrel slinking along the road, and as he wouldn't give an account of himself we arrested him on suspicion. Holy Virgin, isn't he strong and didn't he struggle ? While we were securing him these candlesticks fell out of his pockets. (PERSOME seizes them, goes to table, and brushes them with her apron lovingly.) I remembered the candlesticks of Monseigneur the Bishop, so we brought him here that you might identify them, and then we'll lock him up.

[The BISHOP and the CONVICT have been looking at each other—the CONVICT with dogged defiance.]

BISHOP. But, but, I don't understand, this gentleman is my very good friend.

SERGEANT. Your friend, Monseigneur ! ! Holy Virgin ! Well ! ! !

BISHOP. Yes, my friend, he did me the honour to dine with me to-night, and I—I have given him the candlesticks.

SERGEANT (incredulously). You gave him—him your candlesticks ? Holy Virgin !

BISHOP (severely). Remember, my son, that she is holy.

SERGEANT (saluting). Pardon Monseigneur.

BISHOP. And now I think you may let your prisoner go.

SERGEANT. But he won't show me his papers, he won't tell me who he is.

BISHOP. I have told you he is my friend.

SERGEANT. Yes, that's all very well, but—

BISHOP. He is your Bishop's friend, surely, that is enough.

SERGEANT. Well, but—

BISHOP. Surely ?

[A pause. The SERGEANT and the BISHOP look at each other.]

SERGEANT. I—I—Humph ! (To his men.) Loose the prisoner. (They do so.) Right about turn, quick march !

[Exit SERGEANT and GENDARMES. A long pause.]

CONVICT (very slowly, as if in a dream). You told them, you had given me the candlesticks—given me them. By God !

PERSOME (shaking her fist at him, and hugging the candlesticks to her breast). Oh, you scoundrel, you pitiful scoundrel, you come here, and are fed, and warmed, and—and you thieve; steal from your benefactor. Oh, you blackguard.

BISHOP. Persome, you are overwrought. Go to your room.

PERSOME. What, and leave you with him to be cheated again, perhaps murdered ? No, I will not.

BISHOP (with slight severity). Persome, leave us, I wish it.

[She looks hard at him, then turns towards her door.]

PERSOME. Well, if I must go, at least I'll take the candlesticks with me.

BISHOP (more severely). Persome, place the candlesticks on that table and leave us.

PERSOME (defiantly). I will not !

BISHOP (*loudly and with great severity*). I, your Bishop, command it.

[**PERSOME** *does so with great reluctance and exits R.*]

CONVICT (*shamefacedly*). Monseigneur, I'm glad, I didn't get away with them ; curse me, I am. I'm glad.

BISHOP. Now won't you sleep here ? See, your bed is ready.

CONVICT. No ! (*looking at the candlesticks.*) No ! no ! I daren't, I daren't. Besides, I must go on, I must get to Paris, it is big, and I—I can be lost there. They won't find me there. And I must travel at night. Do you understand ?

BISHOP. I see—you must travel by night.

CONVICT. I—I—didn't believe, there was any good in the world ; one doesn't when one has been in Hell, but somehow I—I—know you're good, and—and it's a queer thing to ask, but—could you, would you bless me before I go ? I—I think it would help me, I—

[*Hangs his head very shamefacedly.*]

[**BISHOP** *makes sign of the Cross and murmurs blessing.*]

CONVICT (*tries to speak but a sob almost chokes him*). Good night.

[*He hurries towards the door.*]

BISHOP. Stay, my son, you have forgotten your property (*giving him the candlesticks*).

CONVICT. You mean me—you want me to take them ?

BISHOP. Please, they may help you. (*The Convict takes the candlesticks in absolute amazement.*) And.

son, there is a path through the woods at the back of this cottage which leads to Paris. It is a very lonely path and I have noticed that my good friends the gendarmes do not like lonely paths at night. It is curious.

CONVICT. Ah, thanks, thanks, Monseigneur, I—I—
(*He sobs.*) Ah, I'm a fool, a child to cry, but somehow you have made me feel that that it is just as if something has come into me—as if I were a man again and not a wild beast.

[*The door at back is open, and the CONVICT is standing in it.*]

BISHOP (*putting his hand on his shoulder*). ~~Always~~ remember, my son, that this poor body is the Temple of the Living God.

CONVICT (*with great awe*). The Temple of the living God. I'll remember.

[*Exit L.C.*]

[*The BISHOP closes the door and goes quietly to the prie-dieu in the window R., he sinks on his knees, and bows his head in prayer.*]

SLOW CURTAIN

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SLOW CURTAIN

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NOTES

I

THE WISE JUDGE

This short play is based on one of the episodes related in the Arabian Nights. It throws light on the sagacity of the wise judge whose decisions were as wise as Solomon's. The Caliph was so impressed by his justice and wisdom that he conferred on him a rank next only to himself.

The play depicts the victory of Reason, Truth, and Justice. It exposes at the same time the weakness of falsehood and cunning.

Notes

THE CALIPH (*Arabic* : KHALIFAH) : Chief civil and religious ruler of the Muslim Arabs.

SOLOMON : King of Israel, reputed to be the wisest man of his times.

There is an Old Testament story of King Solomon that once two mothers were brought before him, each claiming the same baby. He ordered the baby to be cut in two and divided between the two quarrelling women. One of them at once fell on her knees beseeching the King, 'Nay, give her the child, and in no case kill it !' But the other woman agreed that it should be divided.

Who was the real mother of the baby ?

Questions

1. How was the judge able to find out that the boy belonged to Mustapha ?
2. How did the judge decide the case of the slave ?
3. How did the judge decide that the man belonged to the butcher ?
4. Show how the writer suggests an oriental atmosphere in the play.

II

RANA PRATAP

The heroism of Rana Pratap has become a legend, and his name is a household word in every Indian home. Akbar, the mighty Emperor of Delhi, had great regard for the Rana and tried his best to win him over to his side. He failed in his efforts because this brave prince of Mewar would not accept his suzerainty. Akbar could not bear this challenge to his imperial sovereignty and ordered an expedition against the Rana. Rana Pratap's forces were routed in a bloody battle at Haldighat in April 1576 and the Rana barely escaped with his life. In spite of this defeat, he refused to submit to Akbar and chose to become an exile. Hunted from rock to rock by his implacable enemy, he had to spend his days in great misery and hardship.

The present play is based on an episode which has parallels in history. When the Rana is at the lowest of fortune, his former Minister, Bhama Sah, places his entire wealth, collected during several generations, at

disposal of his brave master. The Rana determines to open a new front against Akbar after receiving this large amount of money.

The sufferings and privations of Rana Pratap and his family during their days of exile are brought out very vividly in the play.

Notes

RANA SANGRAM SINGH (SANGA). The grandfather of Rana Pratap and a veteran Rajput chief who, in his efforts to prevent the imposition of foreign yoke on India, gave battle to Babar at Kilanaur.

RAWAT KRISHNA OF SALUMBAR : A brave and tried Rajput Chief who was loyal to Rana Pratap.

RAO SAKTA : The Chief of the Saktawats who accompanied the Rana into exile.

EMBLEM OF THE SUN : The flag of Mewar whose Ranas claimed to be '*Surya Vanshi*', i.e., descendants of the Sun.

SHABEZ KHAN : One of the generals of Akbar.

BIRBAL : A famous courtier of Akbar, well-known for his wit and humour.

Questions

1. What knowledge do you gather from the conversation between Tara and Tejsi about the sufferings of the Rana's family ?
2. Why did Pratap prefer a life of suffering to a life of comfort as a vassal of Akbar ?

3. Write in your own words a brief character-sketch of Bhama Sah.
4. What light does the play throw on the character of Akbar ?
5. Who is the hero of the play ? Why ?

III

THE DEATH TRAP

Though the characters as well as the country presented in this play are fictitious, the proper names (like *Kedaria*, *Kranitzki*, *Dimitri*, etc.) suggest some part of Eastern Europe as the scene of this tense drama.

The kingdom of Kedaria has been the object of claim by two rival aristocratic families. For some generations it has been held by the direct ancestors of Prince Dimitri. Having been crowned at the age of fourteen, Prince Dimitri is only seventeen at the time of the action of this play. Prince Karl who represents the rival faction, sees Dimitri's youth an opportunity for seizing the throne.

In a daring conspiracy, Prince Karl wins over the loyalties of the Kranitzki Regiment and gets the other regiments away from the palace. The Officers of the Kranitzki Regiment are going to carry out their plan of assassinating Prince Dimitri, but their design is frustrated by Dr. Stronetz, the personal physician of the prince.

The doctor declares that Prince Dimitri's heart is weak and he does not have more than a week to live. In a bold but desperate attempt, the young king encourages his would-be assassins to drink along with him wine which

he has cleverly poisoned. In this way, Prince Dimitri takes a subtle revenge on his enemies.

Notes

TZERN : pronounced 'Sern'.

ANTE-CHAMBER : room leading to the chief apartment.

BALKAN : A peninsula bounded by the straitic Aegean and Black seas, or of its peoples and countries.

GIRNITZA : pronounced 'Geer-nit-sa'.

VONTIEFF: pronounced 'Fon-teef'.

SHULTZ : pronounced 'shoolts'.

THE MOMENT THE ANDRIEFF REGIMENT HAS MARCHED OUT...The Andrieff Regiment was intensely loyal to Prince Dimitri.

SHORT SHRIFT (*idiomatic*) : quick work (*in executing someone*).

IT'S A PITY, HE'S SUCH A BOY : As we shall learn very soon from Prince Dimitri himself, he is only seventeen.

GRODVITZ : pronounced 'Grod-vits'.

VIENNA : capital of Austria ; indicates that Kedaria must be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Austria.

WHERE I SHOT: where I went for shooting (*e.g. birds and other game*).

SIRE : Your Majesty (*in addressing a king or sovereign prince*).

THIS IS THE FINGER OF HEAVEN: it is the command of God.

SPOOFED : befooled.

WE SHALL NEVER SERVE A MORE GALLANT PRINCE THAN YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS : Note the irony here.

Questions

1. Bring out the significance of the title of the play.
2. What is the role of the physician in this play ?
Was he serious about his forecast ?
3. (a) Do you admire the young Prince ? If so, state how he wins your admiration.
(b) Do you think Prince Dimitri was justified in taking so many lives ?
4. Imagining yourself to be the young king, narrate the story of the play in your own words

IV

ONE DARK NIGHT

All great reformers, thinkers, and scientists have in their time aroused the anger of their society. The human mind is very slow in accepting new ideas, and resists even those changes which may be for its good. The history of human civilization offers us many instances when the reformer, the scientist or the thinker was persecuted by the people.

This short play offers us an interesting representation of the conflict between an inventor and his community. The inventor Joe had spent a miserable childhood working long hours in a dark factory. He has always dreamed of some means of relieving the children from this back-breaking labour so that they may play and grow up in robust health. He invents a machine which will reduce the need for human labour and, thus, release the children from the drudgery in a spinning factory. As so

as his neighbours get this news, they react violently. They raid his house at night and want to smash up his invention. The inventor's wife, through her intelligence, saves the vital part of the machine from destruction.

Notes

WILL TAKE BREAD OFF THEIR PLATTERS, AND THE MILK FROM THEIR CHILDREN'S LIPS : *i. e.* take away their employment so that they will starve for bread while their children will starve for milk.

SPINSTER : (*literal*) a woman who spins.

PATTERNS : overshoes with wooden soles on iron rings, used for raising wearer's shoes out of mud or snow, etc.

FETCH THE WATCH : call the watchmen. "Watch" is a company of watchmen.

Questions

1. Why did his neighbours feel such anger against the inventor Joe ?
2. Why did Joe want to invent that labour-saving machine ?
3. What were the doubts expressed by Mary about the desirability of her husband's machine ?
4. Describe in your own words, the incident that happened in the dark night.
5. What impressions do you form about (i) Joe (ii) Mary, and (iii) Hob ?

V

IF I WERE YOU

The intruder, is a runaway from law. He intends to kill Gerrard, the actor-playwright, in order to assume his identity, and thus escape from the police and live in peace. The play shows how Gerrard proves too clever for him.

Notes

- I'LL MAK YOU CRAWL : make you do what I want.
THE TOP OF THE CLASS : the best and cleverest.
COPS : policemen.
BEAR IT : run away.
POSH STUFF : high-class manner of speaking.
THAT GOES FOR YOU TOO : 'and the same applies to you'.
PLUGGED : shot.
BREAKS : strokes of good luck.
SAID IT WITH BULLETS : 'I shot someone.'
SPOT OF BOTHER : a little trouble.
PUBLIC BAR : room in an inn where people drink.

Questions

1. (a) Why does the Intruder want to kill Gerrard?
(b) When did the plan occur to him ?
(c) Why does he delay killing him ?
2. Give a brief account of Gerrard's character.
3. Pick out the lines that throw light on Gerrard's profession.
4. How did Gerrard succeed in outwitting the Intruder ?

VI

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

This play depicts very vividly the noble character of a French Bishop. He is so kind-hearted that he is ever ready to help not only the sick and the poor but even thieves and convicts. Such is the generosity of his noble nature that he forces upon a convict the gift of an article which is a remembrance of his mother, and which has just been returned to him by the police who had arrested the convict while he was trying to slink away with it. By his own virtuous example, the Bishop brings about a change of heart in the convict and an incorrigible thief is transformed into "a man" again.

Notes

CRUCIFIX : Image of Lord Christ nailed to a cross. (Jesus Christ was put to death by crucifixion).

MONSEIGNEUR : A title in France, given especially to Bishops.

MON DIEU : A French phrase, meaning 'My God'.

COMFORTER : A woollen scarf or muffler.

CANDLESTICKS : Portable silver-stands for candles.

HOLY VIRGIN : Mary, the mother of Christ.

GENDARMES : Armed police-men, usually on horse-back, in France.

NE'ER-DO-WELL : A worthless fellow who will never do a good thing.

I BELIEVE...SOUL : You want to bring me back to the

path of God and turn me into a good man.

IF I HAD...ME FAIR : If I sell them off, I shall get sufficient money and be able to start life well again.

CHAIN-MATES : Fellow prisoners with whom he has spent a number of years in jail.

HUNGRY EYES : Greedy, covetous looks.

TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD : The body, in which dwells the spirit of God.

PRIE-DIEU : (French, literally "pray God"). A kneeling desk for use in praying.

Questions

1. Why do people want so much that the Bishop should call on them ?

2. How does the nature of Persome differ from that of the Bishop ?

✓ 3. Write a brief sketch of the Bishop's character.

✓ 4. How is the convict made to realize that the body is the Temple of the Living God ?

5. If you were the Bishop, how would you have treated the convict ?

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TEN SHORT STORIES

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TEN SHORT STORIES

Edited By

Prof. A. BHATTACHARYA



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— Sri Aurobindo

1

The Judgment-Seat Of Vikramaditya

FOR many centuries in Indian history there was no city so famous as the city of Ujjain. It was always renowned as the seat of learning. Here lived at one time the poet Kalidas, one of the supreme poets of the world, fit to be named with Homer and Dante and Shakespeare. And here worked and visited, only a hundred and fifty years ago, an Indian king, who was also a great and learned astronomer, the greatest of his day, Rajah Jay Singh of Jeypore. So one can see what a great love all who care for India must feel for the ancient city of Ujjain.

But deep in the hearts of the Indian people, one name is held even dearer than those I have mentioned—the name of Vikramaditya, who became King of Malwa,

it is said, in the year 57 before Christ. How many, many years ago must that be ! But so clearly is he remembered, that to this day when a Hindu wants to write a letter, after putting something religious at the top—'The name of the Lord,' or 'Call on the Lord,' or something of the sort—and after writing his address, as we all do in beginning a letter, when he states the date, he would not say, 'of the year of the Lord 1900', for instance, meaning 1900 years after Christ, as we might, but he would say, of the year 1957 of the Era of Vikramaditya.* So we can judge for ourselves whether that name is ever likely to be forgotten in India. Now who was the Vikramaditya, and why was he so loved ? The whole of that secret, after so long a time, we can scarcely hope to recover. He was like our King Arthur, or like Alfred the Great—so strong and true and gentle that the men of his own day almost worshipped him, and those of all after times were obliged to give him the first place, though they had never looked in his face, nor appealed to his great and tender heart—simply because they could see that never a king had been loved like this king. But one thing we do know about Vikramaditya. It is told of him that he was the greatest judge in history.

(Never was he deceived. Never did he punish the wrong man. The guilty trembled when they came before him, for they knew that his eyes would look

* The name of this era is Samvat.

straight into their guilt. And those who had difficult question to ask, and wanted to know the truth, were thankful to be allowed to come, for they knew that their King would never rest till he understood the matter, and that then he would give an answer that would convince all.)

And so, in after time in India, when any judge pronounced sentence with great skill, it would be said of him, 'Ah, he must have sat in the Judgment-seat of Vikramaditya !' And this was the habit of speech of the whole country. Yet in Ujjain itself, the people forgot that the heaped-up ruins a few miles away had been his palace, and only the rich and learned and the wise men who lived in king's courts, remembered.

The story I am about to tell you happened long, long ago ; but yet there had been time for the old palace and fortress of Ujjain to fall into ruins, and for the sand to be heaped up over them, covering the blocks of stone, and bits of old wall, often with grass and dust, and even trees. There had been time, too, for the people to forget.

In those days, the people of the villages, as they do still, used to send their cows out to the wild land to graze.

Early in the morning they would go, in the care of the shepherds, and not return till evening, close on

dusk. How I wish I could show you that coming and going of the Indian cows !

Such gentle little creatures they are, with such large wise eyes, and a great hump between their shoulders ! And they are not timid or wild, like our cattle. For in India, amongst the Hindus, every one loves them. They are very useful and precious in that hot, dry country, and no one is allowed to tease or frighten them. Instead of that, the little girls come at daybreak and pet them, giving them food and hanging necklaces of flowers about their necks, saying poetry to them, and even strewing flowers before their feet ! And the cows, for their part, seem to feel as if they belonged to the family, just as our cats and dogs do.

If they live in the country, they delight in being taken out to feed on the grass in the daytime ; but of course someone must go with them, to frighten off wild beasts, and to see that they do not stray too far. They wear little tinkling bells, that ring as they move their heads, saying, 'Here ! here !' And when it is time to go home to the village for the night, what a pretty sight they make !

One cowherd stands and calls at the edge of the pasture and another goes around behind the cattle, to drive them towards him, and so they come quietly forward from here and there, sometimes breaking down the brushwood in their path. And when the herdsmen are sure that all are safe, they turn home-

wards—one leading in front, one bringing up the rear and the cows making a long procession between them. As they go they kick up the dust along the sun-baked path, till at last they seem to be moving through a cloud, with the last rays of the sunset touching it. And so the Indian people call twilight, cowdust, 'the hour of cowdust'. It is a very peaceful, a very lovely moment. All about the village can be heard the sound of the children playing. The men are seated, talking, round the foot of some old tree, and the women are gossiping or praying in their houses.

Tomorrow, before dawn, all will be up and hard at work again, but this is the time of rest and joy.

Such was the life of the shepherd boys in the villages about Ujjain. There were many of them, and in the long days on the pastures they had plenty of time for fun. One day they found a playground. Oh, how delightful it was! The ground under the trees was rough and uneven. Here and there the end of a great stone peeped out, and many of these stones were beautifully carved. In the middle was a green mound, looking just like a judge's seat.

One of the boys thought so at least, and he ran forward with a whoop and seated himself on it. 'I say boys,' he cried, 'I'll be judge and you can all bring cases before me, and we'll have trials!' Then he straightened his face, and became very grave to act the part of judge.

The others saw the fun at once, and, whispering amongst themselves, quickly made up some quarrel, and appeared before him saying very humbly, 'May your worship be pleased to settle between my neighbour and me which is in the right?' Then they stated the case, one saying that a certain field was his another that it was not, and so on.

But now a strange thing made itself felt. When the judge had sat down on the mound, he was just a common boy. But when he had heard the question, even to the eyes of the frolicsome lads, he seemed quite different. He was now full of gravity, and, instead of answering in fun, he took the case seriously, and gave an answer which in that particular case was perhaps the wisest that man had ever heard.

The boys were a little frightened. For though they could not appreciate the judgment, yet his tone and manner were strange and impressive. Still they thought it was fun, and went away again, and, with a good deal more whispering, concocted another case. Once more they put it to their judge, and once more he gave a reply, as it were, out of the depth of a long experience, with incontrovertible wisdom. And this went on for hours, and hours he sitting on the judge's seat, listening to the question propounded by the others, and always pronouncing sentence with the same wonderful gravity and power. Till at last it was time to take the cows home, and then he jumped down from

his place, and was just like any other cowherd.

The boys could never forget that day, and whenever they heard of any perplexing dispute they would set this boy on the mound, and put it to him. And always the same thing happened. The spirit of knowledge and justice would come to him, and he would show them the truth. But when he came down from his seat, he would be no different from other boys.

Gradually the news of this spread through the country-side, and grown-up men and women from all the villages about that part would bring their law-suits to be decided in the court of the herd-boys on the grass under the green trees. And always they received a judgment that both sides understood, and went away satisfied. So all the disputes in that neighbourhood were settled.

Now Ujjain had long ceased to be a capital, and the King now lived very far away, hence it was some time before he heard the story. At last, however, it came to his ears. 'Why,' he said, 'that boy must have sat on the Judgment-Seat of Vikramaditya !' He spoke without thinking, but all around him were learned men, who knew the chronicles. They looked at one another. 'The king speaks truth,' they said ; 'the ruins in yonder meadows were once Vikramaditya's palace.'

Now this sovereign had long desired to be possessed with the spirit of law and justice. Every day brought

its problems and difficulties to him, and he often felt weak and ignorant in deciding matters that needed wisdom and strength. 'If sitting on the mound brings it to the shepherd boy,' he thought, 'let us dig deep and find the Judgment-Seat. I shall put it in the chief place in my hall of audience, and on it I shall sit to hear all cases. Then the spirit of Vikramaditya will descend on me also, and I shall always be a just judge.'

So men with spades and tools came to disturb the ancient peace of the pastures, and the grassy knool where the boys had played was overturned. All about the spot were now heaps of earth and broken wood and upturned sod. And cows had to be driven further afield. But the heart of the boy who had been judge was sorrowful, as if the very home of his soul were being taken away from him.

At last the labourers came on something. They uncovered it—a slab of black marble, supported on the hands and outspread wings of twenty-five stone angels, with their faces turned outwards as if for flight—surely the Judgment-Seat of Vikramaditya.

With great rejoicing it was brought to the city, and the King himself stood by while it was put in the chief place in the hall of justice. Then the nation was ordered to observe three days of prayer and fasting, for on the fourth day the King would ascend the new throne publicly, and judge justly amongst the people.

At last the great morning arrived, and crowds assembled to see the Taking of the Seat. Pacing through the long hall came the judges and priests of the kingdom, followed by the sovereign. Then, as they reached the Throne of Judgment, they parted into two lines, and he walked up in the middle, prostrated himself before it, and went close up to the marble slab.

When he had done this, however, and was just about to sit down, one of the twenty-five stone angels began to speak. 'Stop' it said, 'Thinkest thou that thou art worthy to sit on the Judgment-Seat of Vikramaditya? Hast thou never desired to bear rule over kingdoms that were not thine own?' And the countenance of the stone angel was full of sorrow.

At these words the King felt as if a light had blazed up within him, and shown him a long array of tyrannical wishes. He knew that his own life was unjust. After a long pause he spoke. 'No', he said, 'I am not worthy.'

'Fast and pray yet three days,' said the angel, 'that thou mayest purify thy will and make good thy right to seat thyself thereon.' And with these words it spread its wings and flew away. And when the King lifted up his face, the place of the speaker was empty, and only twenty-four figures supported the marble slab.

And so there was another three days of royal retreat, and he prepared himself with prayer and with fasting

to come again and essay to sit on the Judgment-Seal of Vikramaditya.

But this time also it was as before. Another stone angel addressed him, and asked him a question which was yet more searching. 'Hast thou never,' it said, 'coveted the riches of another?'

And when at last he spoke and said, 'Yea, I have done this thing; I am not worthy to sit on the Judgment-Seal of Vikramaditya;' the angel commanded him to fast and pray yet another three days, and spread its wings and flew away into the blue.

At last four times twenty-four days had gone, and still three more days of fasting, and it was now the hundredth day. Only one angel was left supporting the marble slab, and the King drew near with great confidence, for to-day he felt sure of being allowed to take his place.

But as he drew near and prostrated, the last angel spoke: 'Art thou, then, perfectly pure in heart, O King?' it said. 'Is thy will like unto that of a little child?' If so, thou art indeed worthy to sit on this seat.'

'No,' said the King, speaking very slowly, and once more searching his own conscience, as the judge examines the prisoner at the bar, but with great sadness; 'no, I am not worthy.'

And at these words the angel flew up into the air, bearing the slab upon its head, so that never since that day has it been seen upon the earth.

But when the King came to himself and was alone, pondering over the matter, he saw that the last angel had explained the mystery. Only he who was pure in heart, like a little child, could be perfectly just. That was why the shepherd boy in the forest could sit where no king in the world might come, on the Judgment-Seat of Vikramaditya.

—SISTER NIVEDITA

Whitewashing A Fence

SATURDAY morning came, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart ; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face and a spring in every step. The locust trees were in bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation, and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.

Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of white-wash and a long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden. Sighing he dipped his brush

and passed it along the topmost plank ; repeated the operation, did it again ; compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence, and sat down on a treebox discouraged. Jim came skipping out at the gate with a tin pail, and singing 'Buffalo Gals.' Bringing water from the town pump had always been hateful work in Tom's eyes before, but now it did not strike him so. He remembered that there was company at the pump. White, mulatto, and negro boys and girls were always there waiting their turns, resting, trading playthings, quarreling, fighting, skylarking. And he remembered that although the pump was only a hundred and fifty yards off, Jim never got back with a bucket of water under an hour—and even then somebody generally had to go after him. Tom said :

"Say, Jim, I'll fetch the water if you'll whitewash some."

Jim shook his head and said :

"Can't, Mars Tom. Ole missis, she told me I got to go an' git dis water an' not stop foolin' roun' wid anybody. She say she spec' Mars Tom gwine to ax me to whitewash, an' so she tole me go' long' an' 'tend to my own business—she' lowed she'd 'tend to de white-washin'."

"Oh, never you mind what she said, Jim. That's the way she always talks. Gimme the bucket—I won't

be gone only a minute. She won't ever know."

"Oh, I dasn't, Mars Tom. Ole missis she'd take an' tar de head off'n me. 'Deed she would."

"She ! She never licks anybody—whacks 'em over the head with her thimble—and who cares for that, I'd like to know. She talks awful, but talk don't hurt—anyways it don't if she don't cry. Jim I'll give you a marvel. I'll give you a white alley !"

Jim began to waver.

"White alley, Jim ; And it's a bully taw."

"My ! Dat's a mighty gay marvel, I tell you : But Mars Tom, I's powerful 'fraid ole missis—"

"And besides, if you will I'll show you my sore toe."

Jim was only human—this attraction was too much for him. He put down his pail, took the white alley and bent over the toe with absorbing interest while the bandage was being unwound. In another moment he was flying down the street with his pail and tingling rear, Tom was white-washing with vigor, and Aunt Polly was retiring from the field with a slipper in her hand and triumph in her eyes.

But Tom's energy did not last. He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping

along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of fun of him for having to work—the very thought of it burnt him like fire. He got out his wordly wealth and examined it—bits of toys, marbles, and trash ; enough to buy an exchange of work, may be, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him ! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.

He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently—the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Ben's gait was the hop-skip-and-jump—proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipations high. He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was personating a steamboat. As he drew near, he slackened speed, took the middle of the street, leaned far over to starboard and rounded to ponderously and with laborious pomp and circumstance—for he was personating the Big Missouri, and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water. He was boat and captain and engine-bells combined, so he had to imagine himself standing on his own hurricanedeck giving the orders and executing them :

"Stop her, sir ! Ting-a-ling-ling !" The headway ran almost out and he drew up slowly toward the side-walk.

"Ship up to back! Ting-a-ling-ling!" His arms straightened and stiffened down his sides.

"Set her back on the star board ! Ting-a-ling-ling ! Chow-ch-chow-ow-chow !" His right hand mean time describing stately circles—for it was representing a forty-foot wheel.

"Let her go back on its lar board! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow-ch-chow-chow !"

The left hand began to describe circles.

"Stop the star board ! Ting-a-ling-ling ! Stop the lar board! Come ahead on the star board! Stop her! Let your outside turn over slow ! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow-ow-ow! Get out that head-line! Lively now! Come—out with your spring-line—what're you about there! Take a turn round that stump with the bight of it! Stand by that stage, now—let her go ! Done with the engines, sir ! Ting-a-ling-ling ! Sh't ! s'h't ! sh't !" (trying the gaugecocks).

Tom went on whitewashing—paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment and then said :

"Hi-yi ! You're up a stump, ain't you !"

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the

eye of an artist, then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said :

"Hellow, old chap, you got to work, hey ?"

Tom wheeled suddenly and said :

"Why, it's you, Ben ! I wasn't noticing."

"Say—I'm going in a-swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther work—wouldn't you ? 'Course you would !"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said ;

"What do you call work ?"

"Why, ain't that work ?"

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly :

"Well, may be it is, and may be it ain't. All I know is it suits Tom Sawyer."

"Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you like it ?"

The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

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That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the effect—added a touch here and there—criticized the effect again—Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said :

“Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little.”

Tom considered, was about to consent : but he altered his mind :

“No—no—I reckon it wouldn’t hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly’s awful particular about this fence—right here on the street, you know—but if it was the back fence I wouldn’t mind and she wouldn’t. Yes, she’s awful particular about this fence ; it’s got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain’t one boy in a thousand, may be two thousand, that can do it the way it’s got to be done.”

“No—is that so ? Oh come, no —lemme just try. Only just a little—I’d let you, if you was me, Tom.”

“Ben, I’d like to, honest injun ; but Aunt Polly—well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn’t let him ; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn’t let Sid. Now don’t you see how I’m fixed ? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it—”

“Oh, shucks, I’ll be just as careful. Now lemme

try. Say—I'll give you the core of my apple."

"Well, here—No, Ben, now don't. I'm afeard—"

"I'll give you all of it!"

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with—and so on, and so on, hour after hour. And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had beside the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews' harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six firecrackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar—but no dog—the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window-sash.

WHITEWASHING A FENCE

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He had a nice, good, idle time all the while—plenty of company—and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it; If he hadn't run out of whitewash, he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a treadmill is work, while rolling tenpins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement. There are wealthy gentlemen in England who drive four-horse passenger-coaches twenty or thirty miles on a daily line, in the summer, because the privilege costs them considerable money; but if they were offered wages for the service, that would turn it into work and then they would resign.

The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances, and then wended toward headquarters to report.

—MARK TWAIN

3

Gentlemen of the Sealed Knot

IT all began in that moment when I suddenly became quite certain that I was being watched.

I spun round in my skates and stood there, in the middle of the frozen canal, and looked round warily. The Dutch boys might be up to their tricks again. They often were. You could hardly blame them for taking it out of a solitary English boy when they got the chance. After all, England and Holland had been at war only a year or two ago, and they still spoke of our Cromwell as though he were a boggy-man.

I stared round. The canal was lifted high above the frost-gray fields, and I could see a full mile each way across that dull Dutch countryside, until the haze grew too thick to pierce. And in all that landscape nothing

stirred : the windmills stood along the dykes, not a sail turning; the willows and poplars might have been wrought iron, for not a branch so much as creaked or quivered in the breathless air.

"Imagination," I muttered, but I did not believe it. Half-heartedly I tried another figure on my skates. I made rather a mess of it. If the Dutch boys had been watching, crouched down behind the canal-bank, they would have jumped up then, hooting with laughter. They couldn't have resisted it. I could never get them to realise that metal skates were still a complete novelty in England, that most people at home still amused themselves by tying bits of bone to their shoes, and that it isn't fair to expect the same skill from us on the ice.

No, that last effort of mine would have brought the Bresken lads to their feet, holding their sides and making rude remarks about Englishmen who cut their king's head off but couldn't cut a simple figure on skates.

Yet I still had that eerie sensation that I was being watched. I did another quick jump round, thinking that if it was somebody behind me I would take him by surprise. And this time I caught him—if "caught" is the word. For he made no attempt to duck down again, but stood there, very tall, in a high black hat and a long black cloak, like some giant raven perched on the dyke.

I gasped. I could hardly have been more surprised if the Devil himself had suddenly appeared out of that empty landscape. For a moment we stared at each other. His eyes were dark and brooding, deep set in a swarthy face—yet somehow it was not a sinister face, and there was a kindliness in it. It broke into a smile now, and the man spoke. His voice was quiet, low and musical, even though he spoke in Dutch.

I could suddenly make out something about Englishmen. I answered haltingly: "Yes, mynheer, I am English. I am afraid. I cannot speak Dutch very well."

His eyebrows went up. Then it was my turn to show surprise again; for his next words were in fluent English. He shot out a claw-like hand, beckoning me to the edge of the ice, and peered down into my face. He spoke urgently, and for all the quietness, like one used to command.

"What is your name, boy? What are you doing here? Englishmen seem as common as windmills, hereabouts!"

That puzzled me. "My name's Ralph Selden, sir. I don't know of any other Englishmen here except my father—and he's away at Leyden on business."

"Selden.....of course, I remember. Your father is William Selden of Cambridge." He nodded approvingly. "He came to Holland four months ago to

study methods of drainage and dykebuilding, so that he may apply them in our own Fens. His mission has the warmest approval of the Lord Protector."

It was incredible. Father was not famous or anything, yet this stranger had every detail at his fingertips. I began to exclaim. He checked me.

"It is my business to know about Englishmen abroad. Europe is full of wandering Englishmen—traitors who will plot with any foreigner to ruin the Commonwealth. Tell me, boy"—he gripped my arm, and his fingers were like steel through his leather glove—"have you heard of the Sealed Knot?"

"The Sealed Knot?" I shook my head.

He let go my arm. "It's a conspiracy of the old Cavaliers. They stick at nothing. They tried to murder the Lord Protector as he took his Saturday afternoon ride to Hampton Court. They tried to seize the Port of Hull and let in the Spanish fleet."

"I know nothing about all that, sir. The Civil War had finished when I was quite small, and I hadn't realized its fires were still smouldering underground."

"But you are English," said the man almost fiercely, "and Cromwell has made England a great country again. Would you want to see her go down once more to rack and ruin?"

"No, sir—"

"Listen. There is something you can do, Ralph Selden." He pointed to where the lights of the village were beginning to glimmer through the twilight haze. "Three Englishmen rode into Bresken an hour ago. They have a horse to be re-shod, and they have ordered dinner, so they will be there sometime. I would give a great deal to know where they are going, and why. To overhear five minutes of their private talk—"

"Wouldn't that be.....spying?"

"There are times when honest men must spy—to stop treason and murder, to save innocent lives..." I saw that, and nodded. He smiled down at me and went on in a milder tone: "Call me a spy if you like, boy. I prefer to call myself an agent of the English Government." He swept off his hat and bowed solemnly—I had to laugh, it was so funny to see that towering figure bend towards me. "Permit me to introduce myself, Ralph Selden—Doctor Pharaoh, once of the University of Cambridge, and now of any part of the globe where England has cause to send me! Just now she has sent me to Bresken in Holland, but I think it is the Lord who has sent you here to be my helper."

"Your helper?" I echoed. "How?"

He chuckled. "I have one great disadvantage in this work—I am a big man, and once seen, easily remembered. If I walk into that inn I shall be

recognized. Our English gentlemen will keep mum. I shall get nothing for my pains—unless it be a bullet at the first lonely spot on the road when we all move on.”

“They’d do that?”

“They stick at nothing. Only a month or two ago, at Cologne, where the young prince weaves his plots in exile, they caught one of my friends.”

“What did they do to him?”

“Took him into a wood and shot him.”

I thought for a moment. “I expect you’d like me to go to the inn, and find out anything I can?”

Doctor Pharaoh nodded. “And report to me at the small avert at the far end of the village, the Golden Lion. And forget—otherwise—that you have ever seen me or heard my name.

“I understand, sir.”

And so we parted in the frosty dusk. He was gone like a shadow, and by the time I had unstrapped my skates and stepped over the dyke it was hard to believe that he had ever been there.

The great inn at Bresken was quieter than usual, for the roads were almost as slippery as the ice-bound canals, and nobody was travelling who could avoid it. Even so, there was a good buzz and bustle, for it was a popular meeting-place with the local merchants and

farmers, and it was easy for a boy to slip into a quiet corner unnoticed.

[If anyone had challenged me, I should have said that I was waiting to deliver a message from my father to one of the millers, when he came in; but in actual fact no one gave me a second glance.]

I picked out our three Englishmen at once. Their ringleted hair, their ribbons and lace, their silk-lined boot-tops, all marked them out from that assembly of plainly dressed Dutchmen. Yet, when I studied their faces, bending to meet across the table, I saw that in spite of their fancy clothes and curls there was nothing womanish about them.

I saw the firm jaws and narrowed eyes of men who, as Dr. Pharaoh had said, would stick at nothing. One was portly, red-faced and scar-slashed, a hard-drinking, hard-swearing cavalry officer. Another, the youngest of the three, was lean and pale, with eyes that blazed madly, when he showed excitement, in the light of the candles. But the obvious leader of the group, and the most dangerous, whom the others addressed as Sir James, was a little, oldish, sandy fellow, with the coldest, cruellest face I have ever seen. He made me think of a stoat.

Their dinner was getting near its end. The young man was saying: "The horses should be ready to move on in another hour."

"No hurry," said the red-faced man. "The wine here is good."

"That will be your last glass," Sir James told him firmly. "Cool heads till the work is done."

"Cool?" snorted his companion. "We shall be frozen by the time we reach Tielpoort. We need something to keep the cold out." But I noticed that his hand fell away from the bottle and he made no further move to refill his glass.

The young man seemed nervous. "I suppose we are quite certain Wytham will spend to-night in Tielpoort?"

"Where else? He was leaving the Hague this morning. He is in a hurry. That means an early start to-morrow, before dawn. All the better. We shall get him as he steps into his coach. It will be all the easier to slip away if it is still dark."

"I'm not afraid, Sir James." But I could see that the young man was as nervous as a cat. He stared round the great room, at the plump Dutchmen warming their breeches and smoking their pipes around the blazing fire, at the maids bustling in and out with drinks and dishes, at the landlord's children playing with a hound in one corner at myself sitting there with my hat pulled down over my brows, trying to look small and half-asleep. "I suppose," I heard him mutter, "none of these people understand English?"

"If they did," said the red-faced gentleman irritably, "What would it matter? Why should they interfere? Anyhow, in a few hours now it'll be too late for anyone to interfere." Nonetheless, Sir James switched the conversation into French, and I could follow it no more.

That should have been a warning to me. For, if it was only Dutchmen they were afraid of, French has no safer than English. But, at the time, I did not stop to think out the full meaning of the move. I knew that I should overhear nothing more, and, Heaven knows, I had heard enough. Someone named Wytham was to be murdered at Tielpoort, first thing in the morning. Wytham? Suddenly the name seemed to click in my brain. Of course—Lord Wytham, the new English Ambassador at the Hague! The blood rushed to my cheeks as I realized the full importance of the news.

I had already risen to my feet, trying to act casually, like a boy who was bored and tired of waiting to deliver his message. But now I was so anxious to carry my news to Dr. Pharaoh that I moved more hastily. I collided with one of the serving-girls so that she nearly dropped her tray, and beer went slipping all over my sleeve. I muttered an apology, and she smiled and dabbed at my arm with her cloth; then I made my escape just as quickly as I could.

In the doorway I turned and stole a glance at the

Englishmen's table. Sir James and the young man were talking hard. But the red-faced fellow had gone.

I stepped out into the cobbled yard. The night air stung my hot cheeks. My mind was racing ahead of my stumbling feet : in imagination, I was already at the far end of the village, reporting to Dr. Pharaoh at the Golden Lion. I was taken completely by surprise when a voice addressed me from the blackness of the archway.

"Just a moment, young fellow."

"Instinctively, I paused and turned. And in that moment I was seized in a powerful grip and dragged into the shadows. I smelt hot, wine-laden breath on my face. I knew then, though I could see nothing, that it was the red-faced fellow.

"I thought as much," he growled. "You understand English."

"He is English."

Two figures loomed out of the night, and in an instant I hoped for rescue, and started to cry out, but a leathery hand was clapped over my mouth, and I realized that the newcomers were the other conspirators.

It was Sir James who had spoken. He went on : "I have just asked that maid. The boy is staying in

Bresken. His father is an engineer, studying the dyke-building." He turned to me, "Where were you going?"

The rough hand moved to let me answer: "Home, sir."

"What other Englishmen are there in this district?"

"None, sir. And my father is away just now."

There was silence while they considered. Then the young man said anxiously: "What shall we do with him? He must have heard?"

The red-faced man chuckled brutally. "Let him study the canals like his Sire. A small hole in the ice, and no questions asked."

"No!" said the young man in a horrified tone. "We're gentlemen, not murderers! Wytham is bad enough...but we do that for the cause."

"Quiet, both of you," ordered Sir James. We all stood there in the inky shadow. The hand was over my mouth again, the iron grip never relaxed from the arm twisted behind my back. He thought for a few minutes longer. Then he said: "You must not be so squeamish, Anthony. The servants of the Sealed Knot must do whatever is necessary. But the death of this boy is not necessary—it will only hinder our cause by making fresh enemies. Tie him up, gag him firmly, and shut him up in one of these outhouses."

By the time he is found we shall have done our work, and be miles on a our road to—where we are going."

"All right," growled Red-face sulkily. "But he's have made a neat hole in the ice!"

The next few hours were about the worst I have ever spent. How often, playing with other boys, I have been bound and gagged—and how often, after a few squirmings and wriggings, had I got free from their amateurish knots! This time it was quite different.

I lay helpless in a pitch-black outhouse, half-filled with sawn logs of firewood, mighty hard to lie on. They might at least (I thought to myself bitterly) have stowed me away in the hayloft! I had no idea why the Royalist conspiracy had chosen the name of the Sealed Knot, but in this case it was most fitting. The cords at my wrists and ankles held firm against all my efforts.

The discomfort was bad enough, but I knew it could be only a matter of hours before some inn-servant found me—probably first thing in the morning. It was cold, but for a long time I was hardly aware of that: my useless struggles kept me warm. The worst thing was the knowledge that a man's life depended on me. I knew nothing of Lord Wytham as a person, I cared nothing for the politics of Royalist and Commonwealth men, but I knew that murder was

wrong. And if I lay there till a servant found me in the morning, Lord Wytham was a dead man.

Now and again I heard footsteps scrape and slither across the frozen yard, or saw the glint of a lantern through the cracks of the door. I strained at my gag. I could only mumble faintly. Then I managed by working my legs to and fro, to start a miniature landslide of logs. Part of the heap came rumbling down with a loud noise, and I felt sure that someone would come to investigate, but silence fell again, and nobody came near.

Yet, in the end, it was well they had shut me in the wood-shed and not amid the comfortable hay. There would have been no hatchet in the hayloft. As it was, I suddenly discovered it, and, what was more, the tip of the blade was firmly embedded in the large block on which the servant split the logs!

This was marvellous luck. I could not have done much with a loose hatchet, but this one offered me a blade, fixed quite rigidly, in a position that I could reach with my hands tied behind me. It was not easy. A hatchet used only for splitting firewood is seldom razor-keen, and it cost me a good many minutes of desperate sawing before I felt the tightness at my wrists go suddenly, leaving me with only a few loops of slackened cord.

After that it was easy. Out came the sodden hand-

kerchief from between my teeth, a few seconds were spared to massage the ache from wrist and arms, and another minute freed my ankles. The door of the shed had neither lock nor bolt, only a latch. I burst out into the yard, almost falling full length on the slippery cobbles. The first thing I saw was the full moon coming up over the gabled roof, and I knew then how late it must be. I must have spent hours in that shed. And, as I hurried down the street, I saw that nearly all the lights were out.

The Golden Lion was a small, low-class tavern, and I had never set foot inside it. Nor have I, to this day, for there was no need. A great horse, almost black, stood saddled at the door, and Dr. Pharaoh had his foot in the stirrup.

"The boy!" he muttered under his breath, and put his foot down again. "I'd given you up. I've just heard—the men slipped away towards Leyden hours and hours ago. I'm after them."

"They're not going to Leyden," I panted. "That's a blind. They're going to Tielpoort."

"Tielpoort? The opposite direction! Why?"

"The English Ambassador is sleeping there to night. They mean to assassinate him—early to-morrow morning—as he walks out to his coach." I stammered out my story as quickly as I could.

He said grimly : "Civil war is a cruel thing, Ralph Selden. You see where it leads ? Englishman against Englishman. It did not stop at Naesby, nor at Worcester. It goes on—in the colonies, at the courts of foreign princes, above ground, underground, shots in the dark, conspiracies, spyings...but this is no time to philosophize. Tielpoort, you said ? A long way."

Only then did I start calculating, setting the distance against the time. "You can't do it," I groaned.

"I must do it."

"Not with the roads in this state. They're like glass."

He swung his vast bulk into the saddle. "Sir James and his friends will do it."

"But they've had hours of start. They could walk their horses. You can't."

"I must trust in the Lord," he said simply. "Good-bye, Ralph Selden ; you've done a good night's work."

He touched the mare, and she started forward, and down the moonlit street they clattered at a speed that made me wince. I walked after them, simply because it was the way to the farm where we were lodged, and wanted to find my skates where Red-face had kicked them when he seized me under the archway. They were still there all right, and I walked out

of Bresken suddenly conscious how cold and hungry and tired I was. My adventure had ended as abruptly as it had started.

But it proved otherwise.

As I passed from the village street into the open country and saw the long, moonlit road striped with the shadows of the poplars, I was aware of another dark shadow just in front, a patch which moved as I drew nearer. I heard a low groan from the ditch, and hesitated, scared lest some new danger lurked there. I felt I had had enough for one night. Then I saw that the moving shadow was Dr. Pharaoh's black mare, and, as I hurried forward again, the man himself stumbled to his feet. He recognised me at once.

"You were right, boy," he said between his teeth, and I knew he was in pain, "the road is like glass. Hold her a moment, will you? I think my arm is broken." And to my amazement I saw he was trying to climb into the saddle again.

"You can't ride like that, sir!"

"I must." But his right arm hung useless, and he was a great heavy man. I had no strength to help him up.

The moon was riding high in an almost cloudless heaven. The silvered landscape lay under it, bright as day. I knew it must be very late now. It was a

roundabout route to Tielpoort—the road had to bend this way and that, avoiding marshes and unbridged canals. I knew it was no use offering to ride in his place. No horseman could now reach Tielpoort before dawn. I said so, and leant panting and sweating against the mare's flank.

"Then the Ambassador is done for!" He groaned. "Think, boy, is there no other way?"

Then, in a twinkling, the idea came. "Yes, sir! I've just thought—the canal! It runs to Tielpoort, straight as a die! Half the distance of the road..."

"I can't ride along a canal..."

"It's frozen..."

"And more slippery than the road!"

"I don't mean ride," I said impatiently. "I mean skate."

As I said that, I knew for certain that it must be I who went to Tielpoort. There could be few Englishmen in the world with enough experience of skating to cover all those miles. I was not sure I could do it myself. But I could try.

Dr. Pharaoh wasted no time in argument. He asked one or two sensible questions, and then the matter was settled. To my relief, he had provisions, in his saddle-bag, and as I listened to his instructions,

I was able to eat and sip the spirit-and-water he carried in his flask. "Take it," he said, "and the food—but only a sip, mind, when you feel chilled." We said good-bye then, rather solemnly, he mumbling some text from the bible, and I ran down across the fields, my feet scrunching the frozen furrows, to where the canal lay between its high banks, a narrow white stripe running to the far horizon.

I knelt, strapped on my skates, and started, wondering very much if I should ever reach the end of my journey, and what that end would be.

The Dutch, of course, travelled long distances on their skates. I had never gone farther than a mile or two from home, though I suppose, in a long afternoon's skating, I must have covered a good distance up and down. But I had never done anything like this before.

It was an 'eerie journey. The whole world was asleep except myself. Not a light glimmered from the villages. The stark poplars stood up like skeletons, the windmills spread their motionless arms like crucifixes...and on and on, unbending as a moonbeam, the great canal stretched from horizon to horizon. If I had been the man in the moon, I could not have felt more lonely.

On, on...mile after mile... under bridges, over the desolate salt-marshes, once through a sleeping town

with high curved gables and paved quays and a church-spire catching the light like a dagger... on, on, with aching legs and thumping heart—just a minute's pause to sit quivering on the dyke, to tear ravenously at bread and meat, to sip the fiery drink in the Doctor's flask...then on again, on, on...

The moon was sinking. Longer and longer were the crossed shadows of the windmills. My pace slackened. There was a great ache in my ankles, my thighs, in every part of my weary body. Then I remembered those three faces plotting murder over the candle-lit table at the inn, and I forced myself forward again.

Forward ! The moon was nearly down. Only its upper rim gleamed yellow above the horizon. Then even that was gone, and icy darkness flooded the landscape, and I knew I had barely an hour to dawn.

At least there was no fear of missing my way. Similar drains and ditches forked left and right, but the main canal ran ever forward, and even without the moon it was possible to see that ghostly grey causeway stretching ever onwards. Was that a light, pricking the gloom like a golden star, perhaps a mile in front ? Yes ! And there was another. A third over there to the left...

The world was waking up again. I was approach-

ing a town. Heaven be praised, it must be Tiel-poort, no other !

Ten minutes later I was unfastening my skates on the broad, tree-lined quay of the deserted fish-market.

It was not hard to find the principal inn where the English Ambassador had slept. Its galleried courtyard was already astir. Lanterns bobbed everywhere. Even as I dragged my weary legs under the archway, the ostlers were harnessing four powerful Flemish beasts to a heavy coach.

I plucked a servant by the sleeve and asked for the Ambassador only to be brushed aside with an impatient laugh. Then I tackled a lanky, cross-looking fellow, a secretary to judge from the papers in his hand.

"Are you crazy?" he said roughly. Then, with surprise "Why, you are English !"

"I must see the Ambassador," I whispered. "At once."

He gave me a narrow look, summing me up. Then without further dispute, he led me by way of a staircase to a handsome upper room, where a small, white-haired gentleman was eating hurriedly as he stood, already cloaked and hatted for the road.

I bowed as I had been taught to do to a nobleman. "My Lord, I have message—from Dr. Pharaoh."

The old gentleman started. "Pharaoh? That faithful watch-dog. Close the door, Mr. Benson, and stand against it. Well, boy?"

My knees felt suddenly like water. I clutched at a chair-back. "Three men are waiting to shoot you as you go out to your coach, My Lord. They are agents of the Sealed Knot. Sir James Borrowdale and two others."

The secretary exclaimed. Lord Wytham nodded as if he was not entirely surprised. Then he said in a calm tone: "My pistols, Mr. Benson."

"Surely, My Lord, you will not risk yourself—"

"Mr. Benson," said the old gentleman with dignity, "here in Holland I represent England. England does not slip out by back ways, nor does she cower indoors."

"But wait, while I have these men arrested, My Lord—"

"Who will arrest them? We are not at home. And on what charge can they be arrested before they have fired a shot? Warn the escort, Mr. Benson, but do not give the alarm. Leave the rest to me."

The final scene of the drama I watched from the safety of the inn-gallery, peering down into the courtyard. The coach was drawn up near the foot of the outside stair-case. Early as the hour was, the court-

yard was full of townspeople, curious to see Cromwell's Ambassador. The escort, four armed men, kept a space clear from the stairs to the coach-step. I scanned the faces of the crowd eagerly. At once I picked out Red face, then the blazing eyes of the pale young man, then, a pace or two away, Sir James...

Every eye was turned towards the main staircase, as first the Ambassador's boxes were carried down and then Mr. Benson descended, with a backward glance as though expecting to see his master just behind. Yet, when the Ambassador appeared, no one saw him but myself.

He had come down another way, entered his coach from the opposite side, and now stood framed in its open doorway. A pistol glinted in each hand. He spoke quietly, and every head spun round in amazement.

"Well, Sir James, have you something to say to me?"

Their pistols snapped almost together. I heard Sir James's bullet shatter the window of the coach. The next moment, the whole courtyard was in an uproar, as escort and conspirators battled to reach one another through the panic-stricken, neutral crowd.

They got away, the three gentlemen of the Sealed Knot. I fancy that Lord Wytham preferred them to

escape, once they had shown their hand. They had horses ready outside, and galloped away over the fields into the dawn. Only Red-face's horse stumbled, and I had the great satisfaction of seeing him thrown head-first into a duck-pond—and it was no small hole in the ice he made. He came out, cursing and dripping, remounted and fled after the others before his pursuers could catch up with him.

I was wiping the tears of laughter from my eyes when I heard the quiet voice of the Ambassador at my side :

“I think, my boy, England owes you a good breakfast—and perhaps a little more.”

—GEOFFREY TREASE

The Cabuliwallah

MY five years' old daughter Mini—cannot live without chattering. I really believe that in all her life she has not wasted a minute in silence. Her mother is often vexed at this, and would stop her prattle, but I would not. To see Mini quiet is unnatural, and I cannot bear it long. And so my own talk with her is always lively.

One morning, for instance, when I was in the midst of the seventeenth chapter of my new novel, my little Mini stole into the room, and putting her hand into mine, said : “Father ! Ramdayal the door-keeper calls a crow a krow ! He doesn't know anything, does he ?”

Before I could explain to her the differences of

language in this world, she was embarked on the full tide of another subject. "What do you think, Father? Bhola says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains!"

And then, darting off anew, while I sat still making ready some reply to this last saying: "Father! what relation is Mother to you?"

With a grave face I contrived to answer: "Go and play with Bhola, Mini, I am busy!"

The window of my room overlooks the road. The child had seated herself at my feet near my table, and was playing softly, drumming on her knees. I was hard at work on my seventeenth chapter, where Protap Singh, the hero, had just caught Kanchanlata, the heroine, in his arms, and was about to escape with her by the third-storey window of the castle, when all of a sudden Mini left her play, and ran to the window, crying: "A Cabuliwallah!" a Cabuliwallah!" Sure enough in the street below was a Cabuliwallah, passing slowly along. He wore the loose soiled clothing of his people, with a tall turban; there was a bag on his back, and he carried boxes of grapes in his hand.

I cannot tell what were my daughter's feeling at the sight of this man, but she began to call him loudly. "Ah!" I thought, he will come in, and my seventeenth chapter will never be finished!" At which exact moment the Cabuliwallah turned and looked up at the child.

When she saw this, overcome by terror, she fled to her mother's protection, and disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag, which the big man carried, there were perhaps two or three other children like herself. The pedlar meanwhile entered my doorway, and greeted me with a smiling face.

So precarious was the position of my hero and my heroine, that my first impulse was to stop and buy something, since the man had been called. I made some small purchase, and a conversation began about Abdurrahman, the Russians, the English, and the Frontier Policy.

As he was about to leave, he asked: "And where is the little girl, Sir?"

And I, thinking that Mini must get rid of her false fear, had her brought out.

She stood by my chair, and looked at the Cabuliwallah and his bag. He offered her nuts and raisins, but she would not be tempted, and only clung the closer to me, with all her doubts increased.

This was their first meeting.

One morning, however, not many days later, I was leaving the house, I was startled to find Mini, seated on a bench near the door, laughing and talking, with the great Cabuliwallah at her feet. In all her life, it appeared, my small daughter had never found so

patient a listener, save her father. And already the corner of her little sari was stuffed with almonds and raisins, the gift of her visitor. "Why did you give her those?" I said, and taking out an eight-anna bit, I handed it to him. The man accepted the money without demur, and slipped it into his pocket.

Alas, on my return an hour later, I found the unfortunate coin had made twice its own worth of trouble! For the Cabuliwallah had given it to Mini, and the mother catching sight of the bright round object, had pounced on the child with: "Where did you get that eight-anna bit?"

"The Cabuliwallah gave it me," said Mini cheerfully.

"The Cabuliwallah gave it you!" cried her mother, much shocked. "O Mini! how could you take it from him?"

I, entering at the moment saved her from impending disaster, and proceeded to make my own inquiries.

It was not the first or second time, I found, that the two had met. The Cabuliwallah had overcome the child's first terror by a judicious bribery of nuts and almonds, and the two were now great friends.

They had many quaint jokes, which afforded them much amusement. Seated in front of him, looking

down on his gigantic frame in all her tiny dignity, Mini would ripple her face with laughter, and begin : "O Cabuliwallah ! Cabuliwallah ! what have you got in your bag !"

And he would reply, in the nasal accents of the mountaineer : "An elephant !" Not much cause for merriment, perhaps ; but how they both enjoyed the witticism ! And, for me, this child's talk with a grown-up man had always in it something strangely fascinating.

Then the Cabuliwallah not to be behindhand, would take his turn : "Well, little one and when are you going to the father-in-law's house ?"

Now most small Bengali maidens have heard long ago about the father-in-law's house ; but we, being a little new-fangled, had kept these things away from our child, and Mini at this question must have been a trifle bewildered.

But she would not show it, and with ready tact replied : "Are you going there ?"

Amongst men of the Cabuliwallah's class, however, it is well-known that the words father-in-law's house have a double meaning. It is a euphemism for jail, the place where we are well cared for, at no expense to ourselves. "Ah," he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman, "I will thrash my father-in-

law !” Hearing this, and picturing the poor discomfited relative, Mini would go off into peals of laughter, in which her formidable friend would join.)

These were autumn mornings, the very time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest ; and I, never stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it, and at the sight of a foreigner in the streets, I would fall to weaving a network of dreams,—the mountains, the glens, and the forests of his distant home, with his cottage in its setting, and the free and independent life of far-away wilds. Perhaps the scenes of travel conjure themselves up before me, and pass and repass in my imagination all the more vividly, because I lead such a vegetable existence that a call to travel would fall upon me like a thunder-bolt. In the presence of this Cabuliwallah I was immediately transported to the foot of arid mountain peaks, with narrow little defiles twisting in and out amongst their towering heights. I could see the string of camels bearing the merchandise, and the company of turbanned merchants carrying, some their queer old firearms, and some their spears journeying downwards towards the plains. I could see—But at some such point Mini’s mother would intervene, imploring me to “beware of that man”.

Mini’s mother is unfortunately a very timid lady.

Whenever she hears a noise in the street, or sees people coming towards the house, she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves, or drunkards, or snakes, or tigers, or malaria or cockroaches, or caterpillars, or an English sailor. Even after all these years of experience, she is not able to overcome her terror. So she was full of doubts about the Cabuliwallah, and used to beg me to keep a watchful eye on him.

I tried to laugh her fear gently away, but then she would turn round on me seriously, and ask me solemn questions.

Were children never kidnapped ?

Was it, then, not true that there was slavery in Cabul ?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry off a tiny child ?

I urged that, though not impossible, it was highly improbable. But this was not enough, and her dread persisted. As it was indefinite, however, it did not seem right to forbid the man to enter the house, and the intimacy went on unchecked.

Once a year in the middle of January, Rahman, the Cabuliwallah, was in the habit of returning to his country, and as the time approached he would be very busy, going from house to house collecting his

debts. This year, however, he could always find time to come and see Mini. It would have seemed to an outsider that there was some conspiracy between the two, for when he could not come in the morning, he would appear in the evening.

Even to me it was a little startling now and then, in the corner of a dark room, suddenly to surprise this tall loose-garmented, much bebagged man; but when Mini would run in smiling, with her "O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!" and the two friends, so far apart in age, would subside into their old laughter and their old jokes, I felt reassured.

One morning, a few days before he had made up his mind to go, I was correcting my proof sheets in my study. It was chilly weather. Through the window the rays of the sun touched my feet, and the slight warmth was very welcome. It was almost eight o'clock, and the early pedestrians were returning home with their heads covered. All at once I heard an uproar in the street, and, looking out, saw Rahman being led away bound between two policemen, and behind them a crowd of curious boys. There were blood-stains on the clothes of the Cabuliwallah, and one of the policemen carried a knife. Hurrying out, I stopped them, and inquired what it all meant. Partly from one, partly from another, I gathered that a certain neighbour had owed the pedlar something for a Rampuri shawl, but had falsely denied having

bought it, and that in the course of the quarrel Rahman had struck him. Now in the heat of his excitement, the prisoner began calling his enemy all sorts of names when suddenly in a verandah of my house appeared my little Mini, with her usual exclamation "O Cabuliwallah ! Cabuliwallah !" Rahman's face lighted up as he turned to her. He had no bag under his arm to-day, so she could not discuss the elephant with him. She at once therefore proceeded to the next question : "Are you going to the father-in-law's house ?" Rahman laughed and said : "Just where I am going, little one !" Then seeing that the reply did not amuse the child, he held up his fettered hands. "Ah," he said, "I would have thrashed that old father-in-law, but my hands are bound !"

On a charge of murderous assault, Rahman was sentenced to some years' imprisonment.

Time passed away, and he was not remembered. The accustomed work in the accustomed place was ours, and the thought of the once free mountaineer spending his years in prison seldom or never occurred to us. Even my light-hearted Mini, I am ashamed to say, forgot her old friend. New companions filled her life. As she grew older, she spent more of her time with girls. So much time indeed did she spend with them that she came no more, as she used to do, to her father's room. I was scarcely on speaking terms with her.

Years had passed away. It was once more autumn and we had made arrangements for our Mini's marriage. It was to take place during the Puja Holidays. With Durga returning to Kailas, the light of our home also was to depart to her husband's house, and leave her father's in the shadow.

The morning was bright. After the rains, there was a sense of ablution in the air, and the sun-rays looked like pure gold. So bright were they that they gave a beautiful radiance even to the sordid brick walls of our Calcutta lanes. Since early dawn to-day the wedding-pipes had been sounding, and at each beat my own heart throbbed. The wail of the tune, Bhairavi, seemed to intensify my pain at the approaching separation. My Mini was to be married to-night.

From early morning noise and bustle had pervaded the house. In the courtyard the canopy had to be slung on its bamboo poles ; the chandeliers with their tinkling sound must be hung in each room and verandah. There was no end of hurry and excitement. I was sitting in my study, looking through the accounts, when someone entered, saluting respectfully, and stood before me. It was Rahman the Cabuli-wallah. At first I did not recognise him. He had no bag, nor the long hair, nor the same vigour that he used to have. But he smiled, and I knew him again.

(“When did you come, Rahman ?” I asked him.

"Last evening," he said, "I was released from jail."

The words struck harsh upon my ears. I had never before talked with one who had wounded his fellow, and my heart shrank within itself when I realised this, for I felt that the day would have been better-omened had he not turned up.

"There are ceremonies going on," I said, "and I am busy. Could you perhaps come another day?"

At once he turned to go; but as he reached the door he hesitated, and said: "May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?" It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used, calling "O Cabuliwallah"! "O Cabuliwallah" He had imagined too that they would laugh and talk together, just as of old. In fact, in memory of former days he had brought, carefully wrapped up in paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes, obtained somehow from a countryman, for his own little fund was dispersed,

I said again: "There is a ceremony in the house, and you will not be able to see anyone to-day."

The man's face fell. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, said "Good morning," and went out.

I felt a little sorry, and would have called him back, but I found he was returning of his own accord. He

came close up to me holding out his offerings, and said: "I brought these few things, sir, for the little one. Will you give them to her?"

I took them and was going to pay him, but he caught my hand and said: "You are very kind, sir! Keep me in your recollection. Do not offer me money!—You have a little girl: I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her, and bring fruits to your child—not to make a profit for myself."

Saying this, he put his hand inside his big loose robe, and brought out a small and dirty piece of paper. With great care he unfolded this, and smoothed it out with both hands on my table. It bore the impression of a little hand. Not a photograph. Not a drawing. The impression of an ink-smeared hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of his own little daughter had been always on his heart, as he had come year after year to Calcutta to sell his wares in the streets.

Tears came to my eyes. I forgot that he was a poor Cabuli fruit-seller, while I was.—But no, what was I more than he? He also was a father.

The impression of the hand of his little Prabati in her distant mountain home reminded me of my own little Mini.

I sent for Mini immediately from the inner apartment. Many difficulties were raised, but I would not

listen. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came, and stood bashfully before me.

The Cabuliwallah looked a little staggered at the apparition. He could not revive their old friendship. At last he smiled and said : "Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?"

But Mini now understood the meaning of the word "father-in-law," and she could not reply to him as of old. She flushed up at the question, and stood before him with her bride-like face turned down.

I remembered the day when the Cabuliwallah and my Mini had first met, and I felt sad. When she had gone, Rahman heaved a deep sigh, and sat down on the floor. The idea had suddenly come to him that his daughter too must have grown in this long time, and that he would have to make friends with her anew. Assuredly he would not find her as he used to know her. And besides, what might not have happened to her in these eight years?

The marriage-pipes sounded, and the mild autumn sun streamed round us. But Rahman sat in the little Calcutta lane, and saw before him the barren mountains of Afghanistan.

I took out a bank-note and gave it to him saying : "Go back to your own daughter, Rahman, in your

own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child !”

Having made this present, I had to curtail some of the festivities. I could not have the electric lights I had intended, nor the military band, and the ladies of the house were despondent at it. But to me the wedding-feast was all the brighter for the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father met again with his only child.

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

5

*As the Night,
The Day*

KOJO and Bandele walked slowly across the hot green lawn, holding their science manuals with moist fingers. In the distance they could hear the junior school collecting in the hall of the main school building, for singing practice. Nearer, but still farther enough, their classmates were strolling towards them. The two reached the science block and entered it. It was a low building set apart from the rest of the high school, which sprawled on the hillside of the African savanna. The laboratory was a longish room, and at one end they saw Basu, another boy, looking out of the window, his back turned to them. Mr. Abu, the ferocious laboratory attendant, was not about. The rows of multi-coloured bottles looked inviting. A Bunsen burner soughed loudly in the heavy weary heat

Where the tip of the light blue triangle of flame ended, a shimmering transparency started. One could see the restless hot air moving in the minute tornado. The two African boys watched it, interestedly, holding hands.

"They say it is hotter inside the flame than on its surface," Kojo said, doubtfully. "I wonder how they know."

"I think you mean the opposite; let's try it ourselves," Bandele answered.

"How?"

"Let's take the temperature inside."

"All right, here is a thermometer. You do it."

"It says ninety degrees now. I shall take the temperature of the outer flame first, then you can take the inner yellow one."

Bandele held the thermometer gently forward to the flame and Kojo craned to see. The thin thread of quicksilver shot forward within the stem of the instrument with swift malevolence and there was a slight crack. The stem had broken. On the bench the small bulbous drops of mercury which had spilled from it shivered with glinting, playful malice and shuddered down to the cement floor, dashing themselves into a thousand shining pieces, some of which coalesced again and shook gaily as if with silent laughter.

"Oh, my God !" whispered Kojo hoarsely.

"Shut up !" Bandele said, imperiously in a low voice.

Bandele swept the few drops on the bench into his cupped hand and threw the blob of mercury down the sink. He swept those on the floor under an adjoining cupboard with his bare feet. Then, picking up the broken halves of the thermometer, he tiptoed to the waste bin and dropped them in. He tiptoed back to Kojo, who was standing petrified by the blackboard.

"See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," he whispered to Kojo.

It all took place in a few seconds. Then the rest of the class started pouring in, chattering and pushing each other. Basu, who had been at the end of the room with his back turned to them all the time, now turned round and limped laboriously across to join the class, his eyes screwed up as they always were.

The class ranged itself loosely in a semicircle around the demonstration platform. They were dressed in the school uniform of white shirts and khaki shorts. Their official age was around sixteen, although, in fact, it ranged from Kojo's fifteen years to one or two boys of twenty-one.

Mr. Abu, the laboratory attendant, came in from the adjoining store and briskly cleaned the black-

board. He was a retired African sergeant from the Army Medical Corps, and was feared by the boys. If he caught any of them in any petty thieving he offered them the choice of a hard smack on the bottom or of being reported to the science master. Most boys chose the former, as they knew the matter would end there, with no protracted interviews, moral recrimination, and an entry in the conduct book.

The science master stepped in and stood on his small platform. A tall, thin, dignified Negro with graying hair and silver-rimmed spectacles badly fitting on his broad nose and always slipping down, making him looking avuncular. "Vernier" was his nickname as he insisted on exact measurement and exact speech "as fine as a vernier scale", he would say, which measure of course, things in thousandth of a millimeter. Vernier set the experiments for the day and demonstrated them, then retired behind the Church Times which he read seriously in between walking quickly down the aisles of lab-benches advising boys. It was a simple heat experiment to show that a dark surface gave out more heat by radiation than bright surface.

During the class, Vernier was called away to the telephone and Abu was not about, having retired to the lavatory for a smoke. As soon as a posted sentinel announced that he was out of sight, minor pandemonium broke out. Some of the boys raided the store. The wealthier ones swiped rubber tubing to

make catapults and to repair bicycles, and helped themselves to chemicals for developing photographic films. The poorer boys were in deadlier earnest and took only things of strict commercial interest which could be sold easily in the market. They emptied stuffs into bottles in their pockets. Soda for making soap, magnesium sulphate for opening the bowels, salt for cooking, liquid paraffin for women's hairdressing, and fine yellow idoform powder much in demand for sprinkling on sores. ✓

Kojo protested mildly against all this. "Oh, shut up!" a few boys said. Sorie, a huge boy who always wore a fez indoors and who, rumour said, had already fathered a child, commanded respects and some leadership in the class. He was sipping his favourite mixture of dilute alcohol and bicarbonate—which he called 'gin and fizz'—from a beaker. "Look here, Kojo, you are getting out of hand. What do you think our parents pay taxes and school fees for? For us to enjoy—or to buy a new car every year for Simpson?" The other boys laughed. Simpson was the European headmaster, feared by the small boys in the middle school, and liked, in a critical fashion, with reservations, by some of the senior boys and African masters. He had a passion for new motor-cars, buying one yearly.

"Come to think of it," Sorie continued to Kojo, "you must take something yourself, then we'll know

we are safe." "Yes, you must," the other boys insisted. Kojo gave in and, unwillingly, took a little nitrate for some gunpowder experiments which he was carrying out at home.

"Someone !" the look-out called.

The boys dispersed in a moment. Sorie swilled out his mouth at the sink with some water. Mr. Abu, the lab. attendant, entered and observed the innocent collective expression of the class. He glared round suspiciously and sniffed the air. It was a physics experiment, but the place smelled chemical. However Vernier came in then. After asking if anyone was in difficulties, and finding that no one could momentarily think up anything, he retired to his chair and settled down to an article on Christian reunion adjusting his spectacles and thoughtfully sucking an empty tooth-socket.

Towards the end of the period the class collected around Vernier and gave in their results, which were then discussed. One of the more political boys asked Vernier if dark surfaces gave out more heat, was that why they all had black faces in West Africa. A few boys giggled. Basu looked down and tapped his club-foot embarrassedly on the floor. Vernier was used to questions of this sort from the senior boys. He never committed himself, as he was getting near retirement and his pension, and became more guarded each year.

He sometimes even feared that Simpson had spies among the boys.

"That may be so, although the opposite might be more convenient."

Everything in science had a loophole, the boys thought, and said so to Vernier.

"Ah! that is what is called research," he replied enigmatically.

Sorie asked a question. Last time, they had been shown that an electric spark with hydrogen and oxygen atoms formed water. Why was not this method used to provide water in town at the height of the dry season when there was an acute water shortage?

"It would be too expensive," Vernier replied shortly. He disliked Sorie, not because of his different religion, but because he thought that Sorie was a bad influence and also asked ridiculous questions.

Sorie persisted. There was plenty of water during the rainy season. It could be split by lightning to hydrogen and oxygen in October and the gases compressed and stored, then changed back into water in March during the shortage. There was a faint ripple of applause from Sorie's admirers.

"It is an impracticable idea," Vernier snapped.

The class dispersed and started walking back across the hot grass. Kojo and Bendele heaved sighs of relief and joined Sorie's crowd, which was always the largest.

"Science is a bit of a swindle," Sorie was saying. "I do not for a moment think that Vernier believes any of it himself," he continued. "Beause if he does, why is he always reading religious books?"

"Come back, all of you, come back!" Mr. Abu's stentorian voice rang out.

They wavered and stopped. Kojo kept walking on in a blind panic. "Stop," Bendele hissed across. "You fool." He stopped, turned, and joined the returning crowd, closely followed by Bendele. Abu joined Vernier on the platform. The loose semicircle of boys faced them.

"Mr. Abu has just found this in the waste bin," Vernier announced, gray with anger. He held up the two broken halves of the thermometer. "It must be due to someone from this class as the number of thermometers was checked before being put out."

A gust of wind blew in through the window and wafted the silence heavily this way and that.

"Who?"

No one answered. Vernier looked round and waited.

"Since no one has owned up, I am afraid I shall have to detain you for an hour after school as punishment," said Vernier.

There was a murmur of dismay and anger. An important soccer house-match was scheduled for that afternoon. Some boys put their hand up and said that they had to play in the match.

"I don't care," Vernier shouted. He felt, in any case, that too much time was devoted to games and not enough to work.

He left Mr. Abu in charge and went off to fetch his things from the main building.

"We shall play 'Bible and Key'," Abu announced as soon as Vernier had left. Kojo had been afraid of this and new beads of perspiration sprang from his troubled brow. All the boys knew the details. It was a method of finding out a culprit by divination. A large door-key was placed between the leaves of a Bible at the New Testament passage where Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead before the Apostles for lying, and the Bible suspended by two bits of string tied to both ends of the key. The combination was held up by someone, and the names of all present were called out in turn. When that of the sinner was called the Bible was expected to turn round and round violently and fall.

Now Abu asked for a Bible. Someone produced a copy. He opened the first page and then shook his head and handed it back. "This won't do," he said, "it's a Revised Version; only the genuine word of God will give us the answer."

An authorized King James Version was then produced and he was satisfied. Soon he had the contraption fixed up. He looked round the semi-circle from Sorie at one end, through the others, to Bendele, Basu, and Kojo at the other, near the door.

"You seem to have an honest face," he said to Kojo. "Come and hold it." Kojo took the ends of the string gingerly with both hands, trembling slightly.

Abu moved over to the low window and stood at attention, his sharp profile outlined against the red hibiscus flowers, the green trees, and the molten sky. The boys watched anxiously. A black-bodied lizard scurried up a wall and started nodding its pink head with grave impartiality.

Abu fixed his aging bloodshot eyes on the suspended Bible. He spoke hoarsely and slowly :

*'Oh Bible, Bible, on a key,
Kindly tell it unto me,
By swinging slowly round and true,
To whom this sinful act is due...*

He turned to the boys and barked out their names

in a parade-ground voice beginning with Sorie and working his way round, looking at the Bible after each name.

To Kojo, trembling and shivering as if ice-cold water had been thrown over him, it seemed as if he had lost all power and that some gigantic being stood behind him holding up his tired aching elbows. It seemed to him as if the key and Bible had taken on a life of their own, and he watched with fascination the whole combination moving slowly, jerkily, and rhythmically in short arcs as if it had acquired a heart-beat of its own.

"Ayo Sogbenri, Sonnir Kargbo, Oji Ndebu." Abu was coming to the end now. "Tommy Longe, Ajayi Cole, Bandele Fagb..."

Kojo dropped the Bible. "I am tired," he said, in a small scream. "I am tired."

"Yes, he is," Abu agreed, "but we are almost finished, only Bandele and Basu are left."

"Pick up that book, Kojo, and hold it up again." Bandele's voice whispered through the air with cold fury. It sobered Kojo and he picked it up.

"Will you continue please with my name, Mr. Abu?" Bandele asked, turning to the window.

"Go back to your place quickly, Kojo," Abu said. "Vernier is coming. He might be vexed. He is a

strongly religious man and so does not believe in the Bible and key ceremony."

Kojo slipped back with sick relief, just before Vernier entered.

In the distance the rest of the school were assembling for closing prayers. The class sat and stood around the blackboard and demonstration-bench in attitudes of exasperation, resignation, and self-righteous indignation. Kojo's heart was beating so loudly that he was surprised no one else heard it.

*'Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide...'*

The closing hymn floated across to them, interrupting the still afternoon.

Kojo got up. He felt now that he must speak the truth or life would be intolerable ever afterwards. Bandele got up swiftly before him. In fact, several things seemed to happen all at the same time. The rest of the class stirred. Vernier looked up from a book review which he had started reading. A butterfly with black and gold wings flew in and sat on the edge of the blackboard, flapping its wings quietly and waiting too.

"Basu was here first before any of the class," Bandele said firmly.

Every one turned to Basu, who cleared his throat.

"I was just going to say so myself, sir," Basu replied to Vernier's inquiring glance.

"Pity you had not thought of it before," Vernier said drily. "What were you doing here?"

"I missed the previous class, so I came straight to the lab, and waited. I was over there by the window trying to look at the blue sky. I did not break the thermometer, sir."

A few boys tittered. Some looked away. The others muttered. Basu's breath always smelt of onions, but although he could play no games, some boys liked him and were kind to him in a tolerant way.

"Well, if you did not, someone did. We shall continue with the detention."

Vernier noticed Abu standing by. "You need not stay, Mr. Abu," he said to him. "I shall close up. In fact, come with me now and I shall let you out through the back gate."

He went out with Abu.

When he had left, Sorie turned to Basu and asked mildly :

"You are sure you did not break it?"

"No, I didn't."

"He did it," someone shouted.

"But what about the Bible and key ?" Basu protested. "It did not finish. Look at him." He pointed to Bandele.

"I was quite willing for it to go on," said Bandele. "You were the only one left."

Someone threw a book at Basu and said, "Confess !"

Basu backed on to a wall. "To God, I shall call the police if anyone strikes me," he cried fiercely.

"He thinks he can buy the police," a voice called.

"That proves it," someone shouted from the back.

"Yes, he must have done it," the other said, and they started throwing books at Basu. Sorie waved his arm for them to stop, but they did not. Books, corks, boxes of matches rained on Basu. He bent his head and shielded his face with his bent arm.

"I did not do it. I swear I did not do it. Stop it, you fellows," he moaned over and over again. A small cut had appeared on his temple and he was bleeding. Kojo sat quietly for a while. Then a curious hum started to pass through him, and his hands began to tremble, his armpits to feel curiously wetter. He turned round and picked up a book and flung it with desperate force at Basu, and then another. He felt somehow that there was an awful swelling of guilt which he could only shed by punishing himself

through hurting someone. Anger and rage against everything different seized him, because if everything and everyone had been the same, somehow he felt nothing would have been wrong and they would all have been happy. He was carried away now by a torrent which swirled and pounded. He felt that somehow Basu was in the wrong, must be in the wrong, and if he hurt him hard enough he would convince the others and therefore himself that he had not broken the thermometer and that he had never done anything wrong. He groped for something bulky enough to throw, and picked up the Bible.

"Stop it," Vernier shouted through the open doorway. "Stop it you hooligans, you beasts."

They all became quiet and shamefacedly put down what they were going to throw. Basu was crying quietly and hopelessly, his thin body shaking.

"Go home, all of you, go home. I am ashamed of you." His black face shone with anger. "You are an utter disgrace to your nation and to your race."

They crept away, quietly, uneasily, avoiding each other's eyes, like people caught in secret passion.

Vernier went to the first-aid cupboard and started dressing Basu's wounds.

Kojo and Bandele came back and hid behind the door, listening. Bandele insisted that they should.

Vernier put Basu's bandaged head against his waistcoat and dried the boy's tears with his handkerchief, gently patting his shaking shoulders.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if I had done it, sir," he mumbled, snuggling his head against Vernier, "but I did not do it. I swear to God I did not."

"Hush, hush," said Vernier comfortingly.

"Now they will hate me even more," he moaned.

"Hush, hush."

"I don't mind the wounds so much, they will heal."

"Hush, hush."

"They've missed the football match and now they will never talk to me again, oh-ee, oh-ee, why have I been so punished?"

"As you grow older," Vernier advised, "you must learn that men are punished not always for what they do, but often for what people think they will do, or for what they are. Remember that and you will find it easier to forgive them. 'To thine ownself be true!' Vernier ended with a flourish, holding up his clenched fist in a mock dramatic gesture, quoting from the Shakespeare examination set-book for the year and declaiming to the dripping taps and empty benches and still afternoon, to make Basu laugh.

Basu dried his eyes and smiled wanly and replied:

"And it shall follow as the night the day." *Hamlet*, Act One, Scene Three, Polonius to Laertes."

"There's a good chap. First class. Grade One. I shall give you a lift home on my bicycle."

Kojo and Bandele walked down the red laterite road together, Kojo dispiritedly kicking stones into the gutter.

"The fuss they made over a silly old thermometer." Bandele began.

"I don't know, old man, I don't know," Kojo said impatiently.

They had both been shaken by the scene in the empty lab. A thin invisible wall of hostility and mistrust was slowly rising between them.

"Basu did not do it, of course," Bandele said.

Kojo stopped dead in his tracks. "Of course he did not do it," he shouted, "we did it."

"No need to shout, old man. After all, it was your idea."

"It wasn't," Kojo said furiously. "You suggested we try it."

"Well, you started the argument. Don't be childish." They tramped on silently, raising small clouds of dust with their feet.

“I should not take it too much to heart,” Bandele continued. “That chap Basu’s father hoards food-stuff like rice and palm oil until there is a shortage and then sells them at high prices. The police are watching him.”

“What has that got to do with it?” Kojo asked.

“Don’t you see, Basu might quite easily have broken that thermometer. I bet he has done things before that we have all been punished for.” Bandele was emphatic.

They walked on steadily down the main road of the town, past the Syrian and Lebanese shops crammed with knick-knacks and rolls of cloth, past a large Indian shop with dull red carpets and brass trays displayed in its windows, carefully stepping aside in the narrow road as the European officials sped by in cars to their hill-station bungalows for lunch and a siesta.

Kojo reached home at last. He washed his feet and ate his main meal for the day. He sat about heavily and restlessly for some hours. Night soon fell with its usual swiftness, at six, and he finished his homework early and went to bed.

Lying in bed, he rehearsed again what he was determined to do the next day. He would go up to Vernier,

"Sir," he would begin, "I wish to speak with you privately."

"Can it wait?" Vernier would ask.

"No, sir," he would say firmly, "as a matter of fact it is rather urgent."

Vernier would take him to an empty classroom and say, "What is troubling you, Kojo Ananse?"

"I wish to make a confession, sir. I broke the thermometer yesterday." He had decided he would not name Bandele : it was up to the latter to decide whether he would lead a pure life.

Vernier would adjust his slipping glasses up his nose and think. Then he would say :

"This is a serious matter, Kojo. You realize you should have confessed yesterday."

"Yes, sir, I am very sorry."

"You have done great harm, but better late than never. You will, of course, apologize in front of the class, and particularly to Basu, who has shown himself a finer chap than all of you."

"I shall do so, sir."

"Why have you come to me now to apologize? Were you hoping that I would simply forgive you?"

"I was hoping you would, sir. I was hoping you would show your forgiveness by beating me."

Vernier would pull his glasses up again. He would move his tongue inside his mouth reflectively. "I think you are right. Do you feel you deserve six strokes or nine?"

"Nine, sir."

"Bend over!"

Kojo had decided he would not cry because he was almost a man. Whack! Whack!

Lying in bed in the dark thinking about it all as it would happen tomorrow, he clenched his teeth and tensed his buttocks in imaginary pain.

Whack! Whack!! Whack!!!

Suddenly, in his little room, under his thin cotton sheet, he began to cry. Because he felt the sharp lancing pain already cutting into him. Because of Basu and Simpson and the thermometer. For all the things he wanted to do and be which would never happen. For all the good men they had told them about, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and George Washington who never told a lie. For Florence Nightingale and David Livingstone. For Kagawa, the Japanese man, for Gandhi, and for Kwegyir Aggrey, the African. Oh-ee. Because he knew he would never be as straight and strong and true as the school song said

they should be. He saw, for the first time, what this thing would be like, becoming a man. He touched the edge of an inconsolable eternal grief. Oh-ee, oh-ee always, he felt, always I shall be a disgrace to the nation and the race.

His mother passed by his bedroom door slowly dragging her slippared feet as she always did. He pushed his face into his wet pillow to stifle his sobs, but she had heard him. She came in and switched on the light.

"What is the matter with you, my son?"

He pushed his face farther into his pillow.

"Nothing," he said, muffled and choking.

"You have been looking like a sick fowl all afternoon," she continued.

She advanced and put the back of her moist cool fingers against the side of his neck.

"You have got fever," she exclaimed. "I'll get something from the kitchen."

When she had gone out, Kojo dried his tears and turned the dry side of the pillow up. His mother reappeared with a thermometer in one hand and some quinine mixture in the other.

"Oh, take it away, take it away," he shouted, pointing to her right hand and shutting his eyes tightly.

"All right, all right," she said, slipping the thermometer into her bosom.

He is a queer boy, she thought, with pride and a little fear as she watched him drink the clear bitter fluid.

She then stood by him and held his head against her broad thigh as he sat up on the low bed, and she stroked his face. She knew he had been crying but did not ask him why, because she was sure he would not tell her. She knew he was learning, first slowly and now quickly, and that she would soon cease to be his mother and be only one of the womenfolk in the family. Such a short time, she thought, when they are really yours and tell you everything. She sighed and slowly eased his sleeping head down gently.

The next day Kojo got to school early, and set to do things briskly. He told Bandele that he was going to confess but would not name him. He half hoped he would join him. But Bandele said, threateningly, that he had better not mention his name, but he could go and be a Boy Scout on his own. The sneer strengthened him, and he went off to the lab. He met Mr. Abu and asked for Vernier. Abu said Vernier was busy and what was the matter, anyway.

"I broke the thermometer yesterday," Kojo said in a businesslike manner.

Abu put down the glassware he was carrying.

"Well, I never !" he said. "What do you think you gain by this ?"

"I broke it," Kojo repeated.

"Basu broke it," Abu said impatiently. "Sorie got to confess, and Basu himself came here this morning and told the science master and myself that he knew now that he had knocked the thermometer over by mistake when he came in early yesterday afternoon. He had not turned round to look, but he had definitely heard a tinkle as he walked by. Someone must have picked it up and put it in the waste bin. The whole matter is settled, the palaver finished."

He tapped a barometer on the wall and, squinting, read the pressure. He turned again to Kojo.

"I should normally have expected him to say so yesterday and save you boys missing the game. But there you are," he added, shrugging and trying to look reasonable, "you cannot hope for too much from a African boy."

—ABIOSEH NICOL

The Lord Of Chateau Noir

It was in days when the German armies had broken their ways across France, and when the shattered forces of the young Republic had been swept away to the north of the Aisne and to the south of the Loire. *Combined: same day* These broad streams of armed men had rolled slowly and irresistibly from the Rhine, now meandering to the north, now to the south, dividing, coalescing but uniting to form one great lake round Paris. And from this lake there welled out smaller streams—one to the north, one southward to Orleans, and a third westward to Normandy. *when he* Many a German trooper saw the sea for the first time when he rode his horse girthed into the waves at Dieppe.

Black and bitter were the thoughts of Frenchmen

when they saw this weal of dishonour slashed across the fair face of their country. They had fought and they had been overborne. That swarming cavalry, those countless footmen, the masterful guns—they had tried and tried to make head against them. In battalions their invaders were not to be beaten, but man to man, or ten to ten, they were their equals. A brave Frenchman might still make a single German rue the day that he had left his own bank of the Rhine. Thus, unchronicled amid the battles and the sieges, there broke out another war, a war of individuals, with foul murder upon the one side and brutal reprisal on the other.

Colonel von Gramm, of the 24th Posen Infantry had suffered severely during this new development. He commanded in the little Norman town of Les Andelys, and his outposts stretched amid the hamlets and farmhouses of the district round. No French force was within fifty miles of him, and yet morning after morning he had to listen to a black report of sentries found dead at their posts, or of foraging parties which had never returned. Then the colonel would go forth in his wrath, and farmsteads would blaze and villages tremble; but next morning there was still that same dismal tale to be told. Do what he might, he could not shake off his invisible enemies. And yet it should not have been so hard, for from certain signs in common, in the plan and in the deed, it was certain that all these outrages came from a single source.

Colonel von Gramm had tried violence, and it had failed. Gold might be more successful. He published abroad over the countryside that 500 frs. would be paid for information. There was no response. Then 1000 frs. The peasants were incorruptible. Then, goaded on by a murdered corporal, he rose to a thousand, and so bought the soul of Francois Rejane, farm labourer, whose Norman avarice was a stronger passion than his French hatred.

"You say that you know who did these crimes?" asked the Prussian colonel eyeing with loathing the blue-bloused, ratfaced creature before him.

"Yes, colonel."

"And it was...?"

"Those thousand francs, colonel..."

"Not a sou until your story has been tested. Come : Who is it who has murdered my men?"

"It is Count Eustace of Chateau Noir."

"You lie:" cried the colonel, angrily. "A gentleman and a nobleman could not have done such crimes."

The peasant shrugged his shoulders.

"It is evident to me that you do not know the count. It is this way, colonel. What I tell you is the truth, and I am not afraid that you should test it. The

Count of Chateau Noir is a hard man, even at the best time he was a hard man. But of late he has been terrible. It was his son's death, you know. His son was under Douay, and he was taken, and then in escaping from Germany he met his death. It was the count's only child, and indeed we all think that it has driven him mad. With his peasants he follows the German armies. I do not know how many he has killed, but it is he who cut the cross upon the foreheads, for it is the badge of his house."

It was true. The murdered sentries had each had a saltire cross flashed across their brows, as by a hunting-knife. The colonel bent his stiff back and ran his forefinger over the map which lay upon the table.

"The Chateau Noir is not more than four leagues," he said.

"Three and a half kilometre, colonel."

"You know the place?"

"I used to work there."

Colonel von Gramm rang the bell.

"Give this man food and detain him," said he to the sergeant.

"Why detain me, colonel? I can tell you no more."

"We shall need you as guide."

"As guide : But the count ? If I were to fall into his hands ? Ah, colonel..."

The Prussian commander waved him away. "Send Captain Baumgarten to me at once," said he.

The officer who answered the summons was a man of middle age, heavy-jawed, blue-eyed, with a curving yellow moustache, and a brick-red face which turned to an ivory white where his helmet had sheltered it. He was bald, with a shining, tightly stretched scalp, at the back of which, as in a mirror, it was a favourite mess-joke of the subalterns to trim their moustaches. As a soldier he was slow, but reliable and brave. The colonel could trust him where a more dashing officer might be in danger.

"You will proceed to Chateau Noir to-night, captain," said he. "A guide has been provided. You will arrest the count and bring him back. If there is an attempt at rescue, shoot him at once."

"How many men shall I take, colonel ?"

"Well, we are surrounded by spies, and our only chance is to pounce upon him before he knows that we are on the way. A large force will attract attention. On the other hand, you must not risk being cut off."

"I might march north, colonel, as if to join General Goeben. Then I could turn down this road which

I see upon your map, and get to Chateau Noir before they could hear of us. In that case, with twenty men..."

"Very good, captain. I hope to see you with your prisoner to-morrow morning."

It was a cold December night when Captain Baumgarten marched out of Les Andelys with his twenty Poseners, and took the main road to the north-west. Two miles out he turned suddenly down a narrow, deeply rutted track, and made swiftly for his man. A thin, cold rain was falling, swishing among the tall poplar trees, and rustling in the fields on either side. The captain walked first with Moser, a veteran sergeant, beside him. The sergeant's wrist was fastened to that of the French peasant, and it had been whispered in his ear that in case of an ambush the first bullet fired would be through his head. Behind them the twenty infantrymen plodded along through the darkness with their faces sunk to the rain, and their boots squeaking in the soft, wet clay. They knew where they were going and why, and the thought uphold them, for they were bitter at the loss of their comrades. It was a cavalry job, they knew, but the cavalry were all on with the advance, and, besides, it was more fitting that the regiment should avenge its own dead men.

It was nearly eight when they left Les Andelys. At half-past eleven their guide stopped at a place where two high pillars, crowned with some heraldic stonework, flanked a huge iron gate. The wall in which it

had been the opening had crumbled away, but the great gate still towered above the brambles and weeds which had overgrown its base. The Prussians made their way round it, and advanced stealthily, under the shadow of a tunnel of oak branches, up the long avenue, which was still cumbered by the leaves of last autumn. At the top they halted and reconnoitred.

The black Chateau lay in front of them. The moon had shone out between two rain-clouds, and threw the old house into silver and shadow. It was shaped like an L, with a low arched door in front, and lines of small windows like the open ports of a man-of-war. Above was a dark roof, breaking at the corners into little round overhanging turrets, the whole lying silent in the moonshine, with a drift of ragged clouds blackening the heavens behind it. A single light gleamed in one of the lower windows.

The captain whispered his orders to his men. Some were to creep to the front door, some to the back. Some were to watch the east, and some the west. He and the sergeant stole on tiptoe to the lighted window.

It was a small room into which they looked, very meanly furnished. An elderly man, in the dress of a menial, was reading a tattered paper by the light of a guttering candle. He leaned back in his wooden chair with his feet upon a box, while a bottle of white wine stood with a half-filled tumbler upon a stool beside

him. The sergeant thrust his needle-gun through the glass, and the man sprang to his feet with a shriek.

"Silence, for your life : The house is surrounded, and you cannot escape. Come round and open the door, or we will show you no mercy when we come in."

"For God's sake, don't shoot : I will open it : I will open it." He rushed from the room with his paper still crumpled up in his hand. An instant later, with a groaning of old locks and a rasping of bars, the low door swung open, and the Prussians poured into the stone-flagged passage.

"Where is Count Eustace de Chateau Noir ?"

"My master : He is out, sir."

"Out at this time of night ? Your life for a lie."

"It is true, Sir. He is out."

"Where ?"

"I do not know."

"Doing what ?"

"I cannot tell. No, it is no use your cocking your pistol, sir. You may kill me, but you cannot make me tell you that which I do not know."

"Is he often out at this hour ?"

"Frequently."

"And when does he come home?"

"Before daybreak."

Captain Baumgarten rasped out a German oath. He had had his journey for nothing, then. The man's answers were only too likely to be true. It was what he might have expected. But at least he would search the house and make sure. Leaving a picket at the front door and another at the back, the sergeant and he drove the trembling butler in front of them—his shaking candle sending strange, flickering shadows over the old tapestries and the low, oak-raftered ceilings. They searched the whole house from huge stone-flagged kitchen below to the dining hall on the second floor, with its gallery for musicians, and its panelling black with age, but nowhere was there a living creature. Up above in an attic, they found Marie, the elderly wife of the butler; but the owner kept no other servants, and of his own presence there was no trace.

It was long, however, before Captain Baumgarten had satisfied himself upon the point. It was a difficult house to search. Thin stairs, which only one man could ascend at a time, connected lines of tortuous corridors. The walls were so thick that each room was cut off from its neighbour. Huge fireplaces yawned in each, while the windows were 6 ft. deep in

the wall. Captain Baumgarten stamped with his feet, tore down curtains, and struck with the pommel of his sword. If there were secret hiding-places he was not fortunate enough to find them.

"I have an idea," said he, at last, speaking in German to the sergeant. "You will place a guard over this fellow, and make sure that he communicates with no one."

"Yes captain."

"And you will place four men in ambush at the front and at the back. It is likely enough that about daybreak our bird may return to the nest."

"And the others, captain?"

"Let them have their suppers in the kitchen. This fellow will serve you with meat and wine. It is a wild night, and we shall be better here than on the country road."

"And yourself, captain?"

"I will take my supper up here in the dining-hall. The logs are laid and we can light the fire. You will call me if there is any alarm. What can you give me for supper—you?"

"Alas, monsieur, there was a time when I might have answered, 'What you wish : ' but now it is all

that we can do to find a bottle of new claret and a cold pullet."

"That will do very well. Let a guard go about with him, sergeant; and let him feel the end of a bayonet if he plays us any tricks."

Captain Baumgarten was an old campaigner. In the Eastern provinces, and before that in Bohemia, he had learned the art of quartering himself upon the enemy. While the butler brought his supper he occupied himself in making his preparations for a comfortable night. He lit the candelabrum of ten candles upon the centre table. The fire was already burning up, crackling merrily, and sending spurts of blue, pungent smoke into the room. The captain walked to the window and looked out. The moon had gone in again, and it was raining heavily. He could hear the deep sough of the wind, and see the dark loom of the trees, all swaying in the one direction. It was a sight which gave a zest to his comfortable quarters, and to the cold fowl and the bottle of wine which the butler had brought up for him. He was tired and hungry after his long tramp, so he threw his sword, his helmet, and his revolver-belt down upon a chair, and fell too eagerly upon his supper. Then with his glass of wine before him and his cigar between his lips, he tilted his chair back and looked about him.

He sat within a small circle of brilliant light which gleamed upon his silver shoulder-straps, and threw

out his terra-cotta face, his heavy eyebrows, and his yellow moustache. But outside that circle things were vague and shadowy in the old dining-hall. Two sides were oak-panelled and two were hung with faded tapestry, across which huntsmen and dogs and stags were still dimly streaming. Above the fireplace were rows of heraldic shields with the blazonings of the family and of its alliances, the fatal saltire cross breaking out on each of them.

Four paintings of old seigneurs of Chateau Noir faced the fireplace, all men with hawk noses and bold, high features, so like each other that only, the dress could distinguish the Crusader from the Cavalier of the Fronde. Captain Baumgarten, heavy with his repast, lay back in his chair looking up at them through the clouds of his tobacco smoke, and pondering over the strange chance which had sent him, a man from the Baltic coast, to eat his supper in the ancestral hall of these proud Norman chieftains. But the fire was hot, and captain's eyes were heavy. His chin sank slowly upon his chest, and the ten candles gleamed upon the broad, white scalp.

Suddenly a slight noise brought him to his feet. For an instant it seemed to his dazed sense that one of the pictures opposite had walked from its frame. There, beside the table, and almost within arm's length of him, was standing a huge man, silent, motionless, with no sign of life save his fierce, glinting

He was black-haired, olive-skinned, with a tuft of black beard, and a great, fierce nose, towards which all his features seemed to run. His cheeks were wrinkled like a last year's apple, but his step of shoulder, and bony, corded hands, told of strength which was unsapped by age. His arms were folded across his arching chest, and his mouth was set in a fixed smile.

"Pray do not trouble yourself to look for your weapons," he said, as the Prussian cast a swift glance at the empty chair in which they had been laid. "You have been, if you will allow me to say so, a little indiscreet to make yourself so much at home in a house every wall of which is honeycombed with secret passages. You will be amused to hear that thirty men were watching you at your supper. Ah: what then?"

Captain Baumgarten had taken a step forward with clenched fists. The Frenchman held up the revolver which he grasped in his right hand, while with the left he hurled the German back into his chair.

"Pray keep your seat," said he. "You have no cause to trouble about your men. They have already been provided for. It is astonishing with these stone floors how little one can hear what goes on beneath. You have been relieved of your command, and have now only to think of yourself. May I ask what your name is?"

"I am Captain Baumgarten, of the 24th Posen Regiment."

"Your French is excellent, though you incline, like most of your countrymen to turn the 'p' into a 'b'. I have been amused to hear them cry 'Avez bitie sur moi :'. You know, doubtless, who it is who addresses you."

"The Count of Chateau Noir."

"Precisely. It would have been a misfortune if you had visited my Chateau and I had been unable to have word with you. I have had to do with many German soldiers, but never with an officer before. I have much to talk to you about."

Captain Baumgarten sat still in his chair. Brave as he was, there was something in this man's manner which made his skin creep with apprehension. His eyes glanced to right and to left, but his weapons were gone, and in a struggle he saw that he was but a child to this gigantic adversary. The count had picked up the claret bottle and held it to the light.

"Tut : tut : " said he. "And was this the best that Pierre could do for you ? I am ashamed to look you in the face, Captain Baumgarten. We must improve upon this."

He blew a call upon a whistle which hung from his

shooting jacket. The old man-servant was in the room in an instant.

"Chambertin from bin 15:" he cried, and a minute later a grey bottle, streaked with cobwebs, was carried in as a nurse bears an infant. The count filled two glasses to the brim.

"Drink:" said he. "It is the very best in my cellars, and not to be matched between Rouen and Paris. Drink, sir, and be happy: There are cold joints below. There are two lobsters, fresh from Honfleur. Will you not venture upon a second and more savoury supper?"

The German officer shook his head. He drained the glass, however, and his host filled it once more, pressing him to give an order for this or that dainty.

"There is nothing in my house which is not at your disposal. You have but to say the word. Well, then, you will allow me to tell you a story while you drink your wine. I have so longed to tell it to some German officer. It is about my son, my only child, Eustace, who was taken and died in escaping. It is a curious little story, and I think that I can promise you that you will never forget it.

"You must know, then, that my boy was in the artillery—a fine young fellow, Captain Baumgarten, and the pride of his mother. She died within a week of the news of his death reaching us. It was brought by

a brother officer who was at his side throughout, and who escaped, while my lad died. I want to tell you all that he told me.

"Eustace was taken at Weissenburg on the 4th of August. The prisoners were broken up into parties and sent back into Germany by different routes. Eustace was taken upon the 5th to a village called Lauterburg, where he met with kindness from the German officer in command. This good colonel had the hungry lad to supper, offered him the best he had, opened a bottle of good wine, as I have tried to do for you, and gave him a cigar from his own case. Might I entreat you to take one from mine?"

The German again shook his head. His horror of his companion had increased as he sat watching the lips that smiled and the eyes that glared.

"The colonel, as I say, was good to my boy. But unluckily, the prisoners were moved next day across the Rhine into Ettlingen. They were not equally fortunate there. The officer who guarded them was a ruffian and a villain. Captain Baumgarten. He took a pleasure in humiliating and ill-treating the brave men who had fallen into his power. That night, upon my son answering fiercely back to some taunt of his, he struck him in the eye, like this."

The crash of the blow rang through the hall. The German's face fell forward, his hand up, and blood

oozing through his fingers. The count settled down in his chair once more.

"My boy was disfigured by the blow, and this villain made his appearance the object of his jeers. By the way, you look a little comical yourself at the present moment, captain, and your colonel would certainly say that you had been getting into mischief. To continue, however, my Boy's youth and his destitution—for his pockets were empty—moved the pity of a kind-hearted major, and he advanced him ten Napoleons from his own pocket without security of any kind. Into your hands, Captain Baumgarten, I return these ten gold pieces, since I cannot learn the name of the lender. I am grateful from my heart for this kindness shown to my boy.

"The vile tyrant who commanded the escort accompanied the prisoners to Durlack, and from there to Carlsruhe. He heaped every outrage upon my lad, because the spirit of the Chateau Noirs would not stoop to turn away his wrath by a feigned submission. Ay, this cowardly villain, whose heart's blood shall yet clot upon this hand, dared to strike my son with his open hand, to kick him, to tear hairs from his moustache—to use him thus—and thus and thus."

The German writhed and struggled. He was helpless in the hands of this huge giant whose blows were raining upon him. When at last, blinded and half-senseless, he staggered to his feet, it was only to be hurled

back again into the great oaken chair. He sobbed in his impotent anger and shame.

"My boy was frequently moved to tears by the humiliation of his position," continued the count. "You will understand me when I say that it is a bitter thing to be helpless in the hands of an insolent and remorseless enemy. On arriving at Carlsruhe, however, his face, which had been wounded by the brutality of his guard, was bound up by a young Bavarian subaltern who was touched by his appearance. I regret to see that your eye is bleeding so. Will you permit me to bind it with my silk handkerchief?"

He leaned forward, but the German dashed his hand aside.

"I am in your power, you monster:" he cried; "I can endure your brutalities, but not your hypocrisy."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"I am taking things in their order, just as they occurred," said he. "I was under vow to tell it to the first German officer with whom I could talk tete-a-tete. Let me see, I had got as far as the young Bavarian at Carlsruhe. I regret extremely that you will not permit me to use such slight skill in surgery as I possess. At Carlsruhe, my lad was shut up in the old caserne, where he remained for a fortnight. The worst pang of his captivity was that some unmannerly curs in the

son would taunt him with his position as he sat in the window in the evening. That reminds me, captain, that you are not quite situated upon a bed of yourself, are you now? You came to trap a wolf, man, and now the beast has you down with his paws in your throat. A family man, too, I should say, by that well-filled tunic. Well, a widow the matter will make little matter, and they do not usually stay in widows long. Get back into the chair, you

Well, to continue my story—at the end of a fortnight my son and his friend escaped. I need not trouble you with the dangers which they ran, or with the privations which they endure. Suffice it that to escape themselves they had to take the clothes of two peasants, whom they waylaid in a wood. Hiding by night and travelling by night, they had got as far into France as Remilly, and were within a mile—a single day's march—of crossing the German lines when a column of Uhlans came right upon them. Ah: it was not, was it not, when they had come so far and were near to safety?" The count blew a double call upon his whistle, and three hard-faced peasants entered the room.

"These must represent my Uhlans," said he. "Well, the captain in command, finding that these men were French soldiers in civilian dress within the

German lines, proceeded to hang them without trial or ceremony. I think, Jean, that the centre beam is the strongest."

The unfortunate soldier was dragged from his chair to where a noosed rope had been flung over one of the huge oaken rafters which spanned the room. The cord was slipped over his head, and he felt its harsh grip round his throat. The three peasants seized the other end, and looked to the count for his orders. The officer, pale, but firm, folded his arms and stared defiantly at the man who tortured him.

"You are now face to face with death, and I perceive from your lips that you are praying. My son was also face to face with death, and he prayed, also. It happened that a general officer came up, and he heard the lad praying for his mother, and it moved him so—he being himself a father—that he ordered his Uhlands away, and he remained with his aide-de-camp only, beside the condemned men. And when he heard all the lad had to tell—that he was the only child of an old family, and that his mother was in failing health—he threw off the rope as I throw off this, and he kissed him on either cheek, as I kiss you, and he bade him go, as I bid you go, and may every kind wish of that noble general, though it could not stave off the fever which slew my son, descend now upon your head."

And so it was that Captain Baumgarten, disfigured, blinded, and bleeding, staggered out into the wind and the rain of that wild December dawn.

—SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

The Barn

It was not a pleasant night, for the drizzle was coming down in a fine white spray, no wind, but the atmosphere was warmly wet. With the early fall of darkness the sheep in the high pastures had sought the sheltering banks, for it was not fit for a dog to be out, or less a cat. But one cat *was* out, following the course of the stream which flowed down from the moors fully two miles from the village, and as she glided along under the dark bank-sides, she peered into every pool, alert and watchful as a lynx. The stream here was so small that a child could have stepped across it at any point, but clearly the cat knew her business and was there for a definite purpose.

Presently she reached a place at which the water

fell from a mossy shelf three feet or so in depth, and the little pool into which it fell was alive with brook-trout, all about ten inches in length. The pool was no larger than a tea-tray, but it was veritably seething with them, all swarming over each other, leaping at the fall, for this was the season when the trout seek the tiny streams to lay their eggs in the gravel pools.

The cat crouched, tested her footing, and leapt. She seemed scarcely to wet her paws, there was never a sound, yet a moment later she held a ten-inch trout in her jaws. She laid it under the root of a stunted bush conveniently near, where it flapped weakly but never shifted, and again she mounted watch. In a minute the other trout were back, leaping repeatedly, forgetful or heedless of their foes, so eager were they to mount the fall, and so a second and a third she caught, placing each where she had placed the first.

Then suddenly she became uneasy. What had warned her I do not know, for scent could not have travelled on such a night, and there had been no sound, save the trickle of the stream and the drip-drip-drip from everything. It was just as though she had suddenly received a wireless message, for she could not have seen the fox away upstream, because there was a crumbling wall between him and her. Nor could she have seen the vixen away downstream, for the vixen was flattened out behind a clump of bushes. Husky hill-foxes these, there for the same purpose as the cat,

doubt, and no doubt that they regarded this range undividedly their own. At all events, from the way these foxes had circled round, above and below, the cat was in danger—deadly danger !

Pussy seemed to stiffen, then quietly, without haste, she sneaked up the steep banking, leaving the trout where she had laid them. Once over the ridge and out of the skyline, she set off at undignified speed, for a cat at speed is always undignified ; and at that precise moment the foxes rose from their respective lairs, each with ears acock, and set off in the same direction, so as to keep the cat between them. In spite of the darkness and the rain, evidently all three animals were intimately in touch with each other, and the cat at that rate knew where she was going, and meant to lose no time in getting there.

Midway across the moorland pasture a building came up—a very old building which had no chimneys. It was known to man as High Pastures Barn, and was used for storing hay, and for the three old cows which inhabited the pasture. Also it was Pussy's house. She had lived there as sole permanent tenant since her kitten days, and she was now on the highway to leaving a lusty generation of her own kind to carry on. She shot in through the big wooden doors, one of which had been carelessly left ajar by the farmer, then she shot up via a stall to one end of a loft, where she had good cause to know that she was

safe, since every day she sought shelter there from the cow-man's dog.

Inside the barn, where the smell of cow and cobwebs and hay intermingled, it was dark as pitch, and on another rafter a barn owl, uninterrupted, plucked at the mouse he held in his claws. It was their barn and they knew each other. Somewhere, probably in one of the ventilation holes which perforated the walls, for the most part stopped with hay-seeds, seven blind atoms of cathood nestled silently together. Somewhere else was the nest which for generations past the barn owls had used.

So the cat sought her chosen rafter and watched, and presently her back hair stood straight on end, and at the same instant the owl glared up and froze. The foxes had reached the barn, and now they were trotting round it, their trails dividing and meeting, then sniff-sniff-sniff under the door, making sure that the cat was not lurking just on the other side. They knew the place well enough, and having tested the ground, one of them went in, and the other followed closely. This was a cat hunt, and hunting together they had no fear of cats. They sniffed round in all directions, sniff-sniff-sniff in every corner, and the barn owl flew out on muffled wings. Once outside, he sat on the roof and hissed and moaned and caterwauled, till the wet air crept. But meantime pussy kept quite still,

save for the little ripples which ran up and down her spine like a slow-motion film of the wind on water.

The foxes were there for a lark more than anything else, but soon one of them saw the cat, and immediately their eyes met pussy stood up, her back arched, and she opened her mouth in a soundless snarl. The fox uttered a whine, licking his chops, and sat down—rather sat up, making little excited jumps with his forepaws, while his tail brushed and swept the hay-seeds from side to side. Then the other fox came over in a series of see-saw bounds, her eyes sparkling, her tail rigidly erect, and one after the other they leapt up and fell back, just as the trout had leapt at the fall. This was a cat hunt and no doubt about it!—but meantime pussy lay down again and eyed them coldly.

Outside, the drizzle was coming down harder than ever, and there, in the sheltered barn, one would have known it was raining, though there was no sound of rain. One would have known from the constant drip-drip-drip from the stone-crop about the heavily flagged roof, from the murmur of running water, from the general sounds of saturation that filled the whole night. The foxes knew now that they could not reach the cat, so they sat side by side pointing their noses at her and “woosing”. It was a squalling, unearthly sound, and had it been a rooster or a peasant or even a blackcock at which they were howling, their quarry perched above would have become mesmerized, panic-

stricken, giddy, and finally have lost its hold and come down ; whereas the cat, save for occasional glances did not even trouble to watch them. From all appearances she was as content as a cat could be.

Then, at the exact crisis in the clowns' band, something happened. Hitherto the night had been breathless, with nothing about it save its saturation. No stars, no moon, only the permeating raindrops, but now there came a sudden blast of wind, then stillness again. Just that one sharp breath, as is the way of the hill country, and during that instant the heavy wooden door banged with a peremptory click, which meant that the wooden latch had fallen into its socket.

Thereupon the complexion of things changed somewhat suddenly. The foxes jumped, looked at each other, and their foreheads bristled as though each were blaming the other. Again they glanced up at pussy, and she returned the glance with the cold, superior contempt cultivated by her kind. Simultaneously they parted and began to look round for a way out.

High overhead, at one end of the barn, was the forking hole, but as luck would have it there was no hay to speak of in the barn, and therefore no way up to the forking hole, which was fully twelve feet from the ground. Other ways there were, no doubt, but they needed finding, and though both foxes searched they found them not. They sniffed at the corners,

ed up and about, but there was no way within
g distance of the ground by which even a cat
have escaped. So they returned to the door,
the vixen set to work to gnaw a way out.

No use. The door was of oak, fully a hundred
seasoned, and studded with rusty nails. The
d was cobbled, and just then the barn owl came
through the forking hole, and sat on a rafter
ning and wheezing like a skeleton with asthma.
foxes looked up. They flattened a little, and
ears went down. They flattened still more, and
ad of trotting they crept, each with one eye on
cat and the other on the barn owl. They were
ners, and they new it, and of all things on earth
ard fears a trap.

Now wild animals can feel each other's thoughts,
barometer feels the air. The cat stood up, and
foxes moved away as her eyes travelled to the
foothold on the way down. For her there were a
en ways out, for the foxes there was none, and she
ed to teach those foxes a lesson as to whose barn
was. So did the barn owl. Again the foxes tested
y nook, then the vixen snapped at her mate, who
dragging his hind quarters, leering over his
older at her. The barn owl shrieked, they looked
flattened and trembling, and the cat came down
her rafter and sat at the edge of the cow-stall,
ing—staring at them!—but deadly prepared.

Meantime the vixen backed into a corner, and it is surprising how little space a fox can compress himself into when it wishes to become invisible. Her mate sought out a heap of bracken which was the same colour as himself, and lay down under it, fitting in like a chameleon, so that even the eyes of the owl would never have spotted him. The cat took up her place opposite the vixen, then she began to warble that peculiarly frightful and unmusical caterwaul most of us have heard. As for the owl, he alighted close beside the clump of bracken, and that owl was all eyes and claws and feathers. Every feather stood straight on end, his wings trailing like those of a swaggering turkey cock. His eyes were living lanterns, and opened his beak and moaned and hissed, so that the noises were awful. Had a man been there, his hair would have risen straight on end, then, could he have marshalled himself, he would have fled—anywhere, anywhere out of that world. The clowns' band of the foxes had been nothing compared with it.

The dog-fox began to whine hysterically, then simultaneously both of them burst from cover and began to tear, panic-stricken, round the barn; and as they tore, the cat kept the inner circle, like a circus master controlling the ring, while the owl wafted round after them, and shrieked and ripped and warbled and brayed, till those foxes were veritably out of their minds. This was a cat hunt and no mistake, but

the tables had definitely turned, and simultaneously both foxes dived into the litter of hay and hay-seeds which covered the floor, and completely disappeared. The owl wafted back to the roof, and the cat returned to her rafter and began to lick her coat.

Later, the cat went out into the night, and presently returned by a ventilation hole, carrying a trout in her mouth, and uttering the soft, purring call which her kittens answered. Far off were the sounds of man's awakening, the barking of a dog, the clatter of a bucket, and as these grew the hay and the hay-seeds quivered where the two foxes lay, and once the vixen stirred to cover herself more completely.

In a few minutes came the sound of a man whistling as he mounted the hill. It was a fine morning after the rain, full and sweet and refreshing, though as yet there was no sun. The man came up, a bucket under each arm, and calling to the cows, he opened the door for them to enter. They sauntered in, and taking their places began to munch the hay. The man was in no hurry, and, as the cat came to greet him, with tail erect, he took her up in the hands. "Pussy-woosy-woosy !" said he. "Does she want a wee drop o' milk ? Come away, then, pussy !"

He unearthed a dusty, fusty saucer from among the hay-seeds and his first act was to fill it for the cat. Then, as she drank, the man began to sniff the air suspiciously. "Fox,!" he muttered. "There's been a

fox in here, I'll wager, and it isn't the first time the varmints have come nosing round !”

As he spoke he went over to the darkest corner and began to kick the hay about with his heavy hob-nail boots and as he did so something slid away from what was now the lightest corner, and vanished through the open doors. It went silently, like a ray of light, when the man's back was turned. He heard pussy say something, and he looked round to see her bristling, staring at the door. As he did so his back was towards the little pile of bracken, and from that also something rose and slid out within a yard of his heels. But he saw nothing of it, which goes to show how little even eyes trained to the sight of country things may see of Nature's dramas about them.

“Pussy, then,” said the big, burly cow-man, “did you smell a fox? So did I. *We'll* give them foxes if we catch them hereabouts.” But one thinks there was not much danger of the foxes returning to that place for a long, long time. They had seen quite enough of the barn, and if that had been a cat hunt they would look to other fields of sport.

—MORTIMER BATTEN

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The Doctor's Word

PEOPLE came to him when the patient was on his last legs. Dr. Raman often burst out, "Why couldn't you have come a day earlier?" The reason was obvious—visiting fee twenty-five rupees, and more than that people liked to shirk the fact that the time had come to call in Dr. Raman; for them there was something ominous in the very association. As a result when the big man came on the scene it was always a quick decision one way or another. There was no scope or time for any kind of wavering or whitewashing. Long years of practice of this kind had bred in the doctor a certain curt truthfulness; for that very reason his opinion was valued; he was not a mere doctor expressing an opinion but a judge pronouncing a verdict. The patient's life hung on his words. This never unduly worried Dr. Raman.

He never believed that agreeable words ever saved lives.) He did not think it was any of his business to provide unnecessary hope when as a matter of course Nature would tell them the truth in a few hours. However, when he glimpsed the faintest sign of hope, he rolled up his sleeve and stepped into the arena: it might be hours or days, but he never withdrew till he wrested the prize from Yama's hands.

Today, standing over a bed, the doctor felt that he himself needed someone to tell him soothing lies. He mopped his brow with his kerchief and sat down in the chair beside the bed. On the bed lay his dearest friend in the world: Gopal. They had known each other for forty years now, starting with their Kindergarten days. They could not, of course, meet as much as they wanted, each being wrapped in his own family and profession. Occasionally, on a Sunday, Gopal would walk into the consulting room, and wait patiently in a corner till the doctor was free. And then they would dine together, see a picture, and talk of each other's life and activities. It was a classic friendship standing over, untouched by changing times, circumstances, and activities.

In his busy round of work, Dr. Raman had not noticed that Gopal had not called in for over three months now. He just remembered it when he saw Gopal's son sitting on a bench in the consulting hall one crowded morning. Dr. Raman could not talk to

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for over an hour. When he got up and was about to pass on to the operation room, he called up the youngman and asked, "What brings you here,?" The youth was nervous and shy. "Mother sent me here."

"What can I do for you?"

"Father is ill..."

It was on operation day and he was not free till late in the afternoon. He rushed off straight from the clinic to his friend's house, in Lawley Extension.

Gopal lay in bed as if in sleep. The doctor stood by him and asked Gopal's wife, "How long has he been in bed?"

"A month and a half, doctor."

"Who is attending him?"

"A doctor in the next street. He comes down once in three days and gives him medicine."

"What is his name?" He had never heard of him. "Someone I don't know, but I wish he had had the goodness to tell me about it. Why, why, couldn't you have sent me word earlier?"

"We thought you would be busy and did not wish to trouble you unnecessarily." They were apologetic and miserable. There was hardly any time to be lost. He took off his coat and opened his bag. He took

out an injection tube, the needle sizzled over the stove. The sick man's wife whimpered in a corner and essayed to ask questions.

"Please don't ask questions." snapped the doctor. He looked at the children who were watching the sterilizer, and said, "Send them all away somewhere, except the eldest."

He shot in the drug, sat back in his chair, and gazed on the patients' face for over an hour. The patient still remained motionless. The doctor's face gleamed with perspiration, and his eyelids dropped with fatigue. The sick man's wife stood in a corner and watched silently. She asked timidly "Doctor, shall I make some coffee for you?" "No," he replied, although he felt famished, having missed his midday meal. He got up and said, "I will be back in a few minutes. Don't disturb him on any account." He picked up his bag and went to his car. In a quarter of an hour he was back, followed by an assistant and a nurse. The doctor told the lady of the house, "I have to perform an operation."

"Why, why? Why?" She asked faintly.

"I will tell you all that soon. Will you leave your son here to help us, and go over to the next house and stay there till I call you?"

The lady felt giddy and sank down on the floor,

unable to bear the strain. The nurse attended to her and led her out.

At about eight in the evening the patient opened his eyes and stirred slightly in bed. The assistant was overjoyed. He exclaimed enthusiastically, "Sir, he will pull through." The doctor looked at him coldly and whispered "I would give anything to see him through but, but the heart..."

"The pulse has improved, Sir."

"Well, well," replied the doctor, "don't trust it. It is only a false flash-up, very common in these cases." He ruminated for a while and added, "If the pulse will keep up till eight in the morning, it will go on for the next forty years, but I doubt very much if we shall see anything of it at all after two tonight."

He sent away the assistant and sat beside the patient. At about eleven the patient opened his eyes and smiled at his friend. He showed a slight improvement, he was able to take in a little food. A great feeling of relief and joy went through the household. They swarmed around the doctor and poured out their gratitude. He sat in his seat beside the bed, gazing sternly at the patient's face, hardly showing any signs of hearing what they were saying to him. The sick man's wife asked, "Is he now out of danger?" Without turning his head the doctor said, "Give glucose and brandy every forty minutes; just a

couple of spoons will do." The lady went away to the kitchen. She felt restless. She felt she must know the truth whatever it was. Why was the great man so evasive? The suspense was unbearable. Perhaps he could not speak so near the patient's bed. She beckoned to him from the kitchen doorway. The doctor rose and went over. She asked, "What about him now? How is he?" The doctor bit his lips and replied, looking at the floor, "Don't get excited. Unless you must know about it, don't ask now." Her eyes opened wide in terror. She clasped her hands together and implored: "Tell me the truth." The doctor replied, "I would rather not talk to you now." He turned round and went back to his chair. A terrible wailing shot through the still house; the patient stirred and looked about in bewilderment. The doctor got up again, went over to the kitchen door, drew it in securely and shut off the wail.

When the doctor resumed his seat the patient asked in the faintest whisper possible, "Is that someone crying?" The doctor advised, "Don't exert yourself. You mustn't talk." He felt the pulse. It was already agitated by the exertion. The patient asked, "Am I going? Don't hide it from me." The doctor made a deprecating noise and sat back in his chair (He had never faced a situation like this.) It was not in his nature to whitewash. People attached great value to his word because of that. He stole a look at the other. The patient motioned a finger to draw him nearer and whispered,

THE DOCTOR'S WORD

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must know how long I am going to last. I must
the will. It is all ready. Ask my wife for the des-
box. You must sign as a witness."

"Oh!" the doctor exclaimed, "You are exerting
yourself too much. You must be quieter." He felt
it to be repeating it. "How fine it would be," he
reflected, "to drop the whole business and run away
somewhere without answering anybody any question!"
The patient clutched the doctor's wrist with his weak
fingers and said, "Ramu, it is my good fortune that
you are here at this moment. I can trust your word.
I can't leave my property unsettled. That will mean
endless misery for my wife and children. You know
about Subbiah and his gang. Let me sign before
it is too late. Tell me....."

"Yes, presently," replied the doctor. He walked
to his car, sat in the back seat and reflected. He
looked at his watch. Midnight. If the will was to be
signed, it must be done within the next two hours, or
never. He could not be responsible for a mess there;
he knew too well the family affairs and about those
lives, Subbiah and his gang... But what could he do.
He asked him to sign the will, it would virtually
mean a death sentence and destroy the thousandth
part of a chance that the patient had of survival. He
got down from the car and went in. He resumed his
seat in the chair. The patient was staring at him
peeringly. The doctor said to himself, "If my word

can save his life, he shall not die. The will be damned." He called, "Gopal, listen." (This was the first time he was going to do a piece of acting before a patient simulate) a feeling, and conceal his judgment. He stooped over the patient and said with deliberate emphasis, "Don't worry about the will now. You are going to live, your heart is absolutely sound." A new glow suffused the patient's face as he heard it. He asked in a tone of relief, "Do you say so? If it comes from your lips, it must be true....."

The doctor said, "Quite right. You are improving every second. Sleep in peace. You must not exert yourself on any account. You must sleep very soundly. I will see you in the morning." The patient looked at him gratefully for a moment and then closed his eyes. The doctor picked up his bag and went out shutting the door softly behind him.

On his way home he stopped for a moment at his hospital, called out his assistant, and said, "That Lawely Extension case. You might expect the collapse any second now. Go there with a tube of...in hand, and give it in case the struggle is too hard at the end. Hurry up."

Next morning he was back at Lawely Extension at ten. From his car he made a dash for the sick bed. The patient was awake and looked very well. The assistant reported satisfactory pulse. The doctor put

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Heube at his heart, listened for a while, and told the
man's wife, "Don't look so unhappy, lady. Your
husband will live to be ninety." When they were going
to the hospital, the assistant sitting beside him
in the car asked, "Is he going to live, sir?"

"I will bet on it. He will live to be ninety. He
turned the corner. How he has survived this attack
will be a puzzle to me all my life," replied the doctor.

R.K. NARAYAN

The Magi were the three persons which brought gifts for Jesus. The gifts did not have a much materialistic value but had their love and affection behind it.

(Thoughtfulness, struggle, affection, love.) These three travelled a long distance and presented valuable gifts to the poor baby. The gifts were of course to the Jesus. There is a great similarity between gifts of these and Bellasud Jim's. This wise act of theirs was the outcome of the immense love they bore the new born and thus the long journey wrought with odds in the days when ^{means of} ~~the~~ Commun were far from ~~its~~ factory ~~mitigates~~ ~~their~~ was not of much consequence and bother to the Magi. The gifts of Jim and Bella were ~~also~~ likewise preceded by long drawn struggle and immense effort on their part. ~~and~~

- (1) Justify the title of the story.
- (2) Character sketch of Tim and Della.
- (3) The Gift of the Magi is an irony of fate. Discuss in the light of the story.
- The Gift**
- (4) Life is made up of sobs, Of snuffles and smiles, which **The Magi** snuffles predominating. Discuss.
- (5) Whose sacrifice, Della's or Tim's why? Give reason.

ONE dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, snuffles, and smiles, with snuffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at

the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The 'Dillingham' had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a

present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little near to being worthy of the honour of being owned by Jim.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Ellingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his mother's and grand father's. The other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the shaft, Della would have let her hair hang out of the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly: Once she faltered for a minute and

stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown Jacket ; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out of the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read : 'Mme Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds.' One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the 'Sofronie'.

"Will you buy my hair ?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take your hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by

substance alone and not by meretricious ornamenta-
tion—as all good things should do. It was even
worthy of the Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew
that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and
value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one
dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home
with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim
might be properly anxious about the time in any com-
pany. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked
at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that
he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave
way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her
curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work
repairing the ravages made by generosity added to
love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends
—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with
tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully
like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection
in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "be-
fore he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like
a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh !
What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents ?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-

pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered : "Please, God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family ! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stepped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind,

"Will you? I just had to do it, My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet, even after the hardest mental labour.

"Cut it off and sold' it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you, May be the hairs on my head were numbered," she went on with a sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The Magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you will unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy ; and then, alas ! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della and worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoiseshell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say : "My hair grows so fast, Jim !"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh !"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim ? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They are too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, (as you know,) were wise men—(wonderfully wise men)—who brought gifts to the babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But

in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are the wisest. They are the magi.

—O. HENRY
(William Sydney Porter)

10

*The Face
On
The Wall*

I still tingle with mortification over an experience at Dabney's last evening, the only satisfaction being that others tingle with me. We were talking of the supernatural—that unprofitable but endlessly alluring theme—and most of us had cited an instance, without, however, producing much effect. Among the strangers to me was a little man with an anxious white face, whom Rudson-Wayte had brought, and he watched each speaker with the closest attention, but said nothing. Then Dabney, wishing to include him in the talk, turned to him and asked if he had no experience to relate, no story that contained an inexplicable element.

He thought a moment. “Well,” he said, “not a story in the ordinary sense of the word: nothing, that

is, from hearsay, like most of your examples. Truth, I always hold, is not only vastly stranger than fiction, but also vastly more interesting. I could tell you an occurrence which happened to me personally, and which oddly enough completed itself only this afternoon."

We begged him to begin.

"A year or two ago," he said, "I was in rooms in Great Ormond Street—an old house on the Holborn side. The bedroom walls had been distempered by a previous tenant, but the place was damp and great patches of discoloration had broken out. One of these—as indeed often happens—was exactly like a human face; but more faithfully and startlingly than is customary. Lying in bed in the morning, putting off getting up, I used to watch it and watch it, and gradually I came to think of it as real — as my fellow lodger, in fact. The odd thing was that while the patches on the walls grew larger and changed their contours, this never did. It remained identically the same.

"While there, I had a very bad attack of influenza, with complications, and all day long I had nothing to do but read or meditate, and it was then that this face began to get a firmer hold of me. It grew more and more real and remarkable. I may say that it dominated my thoughts day and night. There was a

rious turn to the nose, and the slant of the forehead was unique. It was, in fact, full of individuality : the face of a man apart, a man in a thousand.

"Well, I got better, but the face still controlled me. I found myself searching the streets for one like . . . Somewhere, I was convinced, the real man must exist, and him I must meet. Why, I had no notion, I only knew that he and I were in some way linked by fate. I frequented places where men congregate in large numbers—political meetings, football matches, the railway stations when the suburban trains pour forth their legions on the City in the morning and receive them again in the evening. But all in vain. I had never before realized as I then did how many different faces of man there are and how few. For all differ, and yet, classified, they belong to only as many groups as you can count on your hands.

"The search became a mania with me. I neglected everything else. I stood at busy corners watching the crowd until people thought me crazy, and the police began to know me and be suspicious. Women I never glanced at : men, men, men, all the time."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow. "And then," he continued, "at last I saw him. He was in a taxi driving east along Piccadilly. I turned and ran beside it for a little way and then saw an empty one coming. 'Follow that taxi,' I gasped, and leaped in. The driver managed to keep it in sight and it

took us to Charing Cross. I rushed on to the platform and found my man with two ladies and a little girl. They were going to France by the 2.20. I hung about to try and get a word with him, but in vain. Other friends had joined the party, and they moved to the train in a solid body.

"I hastily purchased a ticket to Folkestone, hoping that I should catch him on the boat before it sailed; but at Folkestone he got on board before me with his friends, and they disappeared into a large private saloon, several cabins thrown into one. Evidently he was a man of wealth.

"Again I was foiled; but I determined to cross too, feeling certain that when the voyage had begun he would leave the ladies and come out for a stroll on the deck. I had only just enough fare to Boulogne, but nothing could shake me now. I took up my position opposite the saloon door and waited. After half an hour the door opened and he came out, but with the little girl. My heart beat so that it seemed to shake the boat more than the propeller. There was no mistaking the face—every line was the same. He glanced at me and moved towards the companion-way for the upper deck. It was now or never, I felt.

"'Excuse me,' I stammered, 'but do you mind giving me your card? I have a very important reason for wishing to communicate with you.'

"He seemed to be astonished, as indeed well he might; but he complied. With extreme deliberation he took out his case and handed me his card and carried on with the little girl. It was clear that he thought me a lunatic and considered it wiser to humiliate me than not.

"Clutching the card I hurried to a deserted corner of the ship and read it. My eyes dimmed; my head ached; for on it were the words: Mr. Ormond Wall, with an address at Pittsburg, U.S.A. I remember no more until I found myself at Boulogne. There I lay in a broken condition for some weeks, and only a month ago did I return."

He was silent.

We looked at him and at one another and waited. All the other talk of the evening was nothing compared with the story of the little pale man.

"I went back," he resumed after a moment or so, "to Great Ormond Street and set to work to discover all I could about this American in whose life I had so mysteriously intervened. I wrote to Pittsburg; I wrote to American editors; I cultivated the society of Americans in London; but all that I could find out was that he was a millionaire with English parents who had resided in London. But where? To that question I received no answer.

"And so the time went on until yesterday morning. I had gone to bed more than usually tired and slept till late. When I woke the sun was streaming into the room. As I always do, I looked at once at the wall on which the face is to be seen. I rubbed my eyes and sprang up in alarm. It was only faintly visible. Last night it had been as clear as ever—almost I could hear it speak. And now it was but a ghost of itself.

"I got up dazed and dejected and went out. The early editions of the newspapers were already out, and on the contents bill I saw, 'American millionaire's Motor accident'. You must all of you have seen it. I bought it and read at once what I knew I should read. Mr. Ormond Wall, the Pittsburg millionaire, and party, motoring from Spezzia to Pisa, had come into collision with a wagon and were overturned; Mr. Wall's condition was critical.

"I went back to my room still dazed, and sat on the bed looking with unseeing eyes at the face on the wall. And even as I looked, suddenly it completely disappeared.

"Later I found that Mr. Wall had succumbed to his injuries at what I take to be that very moment."

Again he was silent.

"Most remarkable," we said; "most extraordinary—"

nary," and so forth, and we meant it too.

"Yes," said the stranger. "There are three extraordinary, three most remarkable things about my story. One is that it should be possible for the discoloration in a lodging-house in London not only to form the features of a gentleman in America, but to have this intimate association with his existence. It will take Science some time to explain that. Another is that that gentleman's name should bear any relation to the spot on which his features were being so curiously reproduced by some mysterious agency. Is it not so?"

We agreed with him, and our original discussion on supernatural manifestations set in again with increased excitement, during which the narrator of the amazing experience rose and said good-night. Just as he was at the door, one of the company—I rejoice to think it was Spanton—recalled us to the cause of our excited debate by asking him, before he left, what he considered the third extraordinary thing in connection with his deeply interesting story. "You said three things, you know," Spanton reminded him.

"Oh, the third thing," he said, as he opened the door, "I was forgetting that. The third extraordinary thing about the story is that I made it up about half an hour ago. Good-night, again."

After coming to our senses we looked round for Rudson-Wayte, who had brought this snake to bite our bosoms, but he too had disappeared.

—E.V. LUCAS

THE JUDGMENT-SEAT OF VIKRAMADITYA

Vikramaditya—derived from “vikram” (prowess) and “aditya” (the sun), and literally meaning like the sun in prowess—appears to have been a title assumed in ancient India by many illustrious rulers, including those of the Gupta dynasty. One such is believed to have ruled at Ujjain in the first century B.C. and to have started the era known to date as Vikram samvat. In the course of time several legends have grown around the life and attainments of this Vikramaditya, whose identity still remains to be firmly established by historians. These legends indicate that he was not only a very wise and learned ruler but was also a great patron of all learning including medicine, astronomy and of fine arts. The Nine Jewels (Navaratna) of his court are said to have included the celebrated poet-dramatist Kalidasa.

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1. **Homer** : Ancient Greek poet, wrote two of the world's greatest epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.
1. **Dante** : Italian poet (1265-1321), wrote the immortal work *La Divina Comedia* (The Divine Comedy).
2. **our King Arthur** : Legendary king of the Britons and founder of the order of the Knights of the Round Table, supposed to have lived in the 6th century.

2. **Alfred the Great** : Chosen king of Wessex in 871 and later acknowledged by the whole of England as its overlord.
3. **shepherds** : Obviously, *cowherds* is meant.
4. **saying poetry to them** : The offerings were made to the chanting of the proper verses.
5. **whoop** : a loud, eager cry.
5. **straightened his face** : A 'straight-face' is a sober, unsmiling face like that of a judge.
9. **retreat** : Here, a special period of religious meditation and prayer.

Words to learn

concoct controvert countenance (n. & vb.)
 essay (vb.) frolic perplex ponder prostrate
 (adj. & vb.).

QUESTIONS

1. Give very brief answers to the following questions :—
 - (a) What were the 3 questions put by the angels successively to the king ?
 - (b) "Is thy will like unto that of a little child ?" What did the angels mean by this ?
 - (c) How was Vikramaditya's judgment-seat found again ?
 - (d) What effect did sitting on the mound have on the cowherd boy ?
2. How much does the story tell you about Vikramaditya ?
3. Picture the cowherd boys taking the cows to pasture and bringing them back at 'cowdust'.

4. Concoct a case of your own for trial by the cowherd boy, describe the trial, and report the judgment.
5. Why was the king not allowed to sit on the judgment-seat by the angels ?
6. Why could the cowherd sit *'where no king in the world might come'* ?

2. WHITEWASHING A FENCE

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13. **There was a song**, etc. : Everybody felt cheerful, and those that were young burst into song because of this.
13. **a spring in every step** : People moved about on light nimble steps because they felt so light at heart.
13. **a Delectable Land**—**'Delectable'** means delightful, 'pleasant'. There is a reference here to the land 'flowing with milk and honey', promised by God to Abraham, ancestor of the people of Israel, for his descendants. Moses, the great law-giver, under whom Israel first began to be a nation, saw this land from the top of Mount Pisgah.
14. **mulatto** : offspring of one white and one black parent.
14. **trading** : exchanging, on a business basis.
14. **skylarking** : engaging in noisy merrymaking.

14. **"Can't, Mars Tom, etc."** : "I cannot, Master Tom. The old mistress told me that I had to go and get this water and not stop fooling round with anybody. She says that she expects that Master Tom is going to ask me to whitewash and so she told me to go along and attend to my own business—she allowed (said) that she would attend to the whitewashing."

Jim, the slave-boy of the house, is speaking the English of his race and class.

14. **Gimme** : Give me.
15. **dasn't** : dare not.
15. **tar de head off'n me** : tear the head off me.
15. **licks** : (slang) thrashes.
15. **marvel**, i.e. marble : An '*alley*' or '*taw*' is a choice large marble.
15. **bully** : (U.S.) first-rate.
15. **Powerful 'fraid**—mightily afraid.
16. **enough to buy an exchange of work** : Some boy might agree to *exchange work* with Tom if offered his (Tom's) precious possessions. But what Tom wanted was *freedom*.
16. **hove in sight** : came into view.
16. **his anticipations high** : he looked forward to enjoying himself hugely.
16. **As he drew near, etc.** : You are to imagine a big steamer about to be moored to the river-bank. '*starboard*' is the right hand side, '*lar-board*' the left hand side, of a ship, looking from the stern. To '*round to*' is to turn the head of a ship (to the wind). The movement was '*ponderous*'

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(laborious, slow and made with difficulty) because the ship was big and heavy. '*with laborious pomp and circumstances*' means 'with a painstaking observance of the right form of every part of the operation.' '*hurricanedeck*' is a light deck over the saloon of a steamer. '*headway*' is motion ahead. '*head-line*' is the rope at the head of a vessel, and '*spring-line*' is the mooring rope.

17. (Stop) **the starboard** : i.e., the engine driving the starboard paddle.
17. **Lively now** : Be quick !
17. **what're you about there** : what are you doing there ! Why can't you be more quick about it.
17. **the bight of it** : the loop of the mooring rope. It is to be fastened to a particular stump (stout cylindrical log of wood fixed firmly in the ground).
17. **up a stump** : 'cornered', in an unpleasant position from which there is no escape.
18. **you'd druther** : you'd rather.
18. **let on** : pretend.
19. **I wouldn't hardly do** : it wouldn't do at all.
19. **honest injun** : (slang) An oath questioning or, as here, confirming a statement. '*injun*' is for 'Indian'.
19. **I'm fixed** : am in a position in which it is difficult to say 'yes' or 'no'.
19. **shucks** : An exclamation of disappointment.

20. **slaughter of more innocents** : beggaring other simple-minded boys by possessing himself of their 'wealth'. 'Slaughter of the innocents' refers to the butchery by King Herod of all the children of Bethlehem under two years old with the object of cutting off the infant Jesus.
20. **played out** : completed his turn.
20. **bought in** : got the privilege of whitewashing by offering Tom more than did the others present.
20. **jew's harp** : a small musical instrument shaped like the lyre.
21. **treadmill** : a machine with a cylindrical wheel provided with steps. Motion is produced by a person (or a horse) stepping from one step to another. Working a treadmill is, of course, very hard work.
21. **tenpins** : a game in which the aim is to knock down with a wooden ball ten pins (wooden pegs) set up at the far end of the pitch. The ball is so made that it cannot roll straight.
21. **towards headquarters** : i.e., to his aunt.

Words to learn

anticipation bankrupt delectable dilapidated
 inspiration personate straitened
 tingle

QUESTIONS

1. Give very brief answers to the following questions :—
- (a) What is your impression about Tom's aunt ?

- (b) How did Tom get round Jim's unwillingness to undertake the whitewashing ?
- (c) 'He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work.' (p. 16) What was Tom's purpose in this ?
- (d) 'That put the thing in a new light.' (p. 19) What *thing* and what *light* ?
- (e) What makes an occupation work to some but play to another ?
2. Describe briefly Tom's slaughter of the innocents.
 3. Look up in the dictionary 'strategy'. Is Tom a strategist ? Give reasons for your answer.
 4. 'He had discovered a great law of human nature.' What is the law, and how does it work ?
 5. Where does the humour of the story lie ?

3. GENTLEMEN OF THE SEALED KNOT

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23. **taking it out of** : causing the utmost trouble to, as punishment.
23. **a bogy-man** : a 'bug-bear, a special object of fear.
24. **the dykes** : the sea-walls. A great part of Holland being below the sea-level, dykes have been constructed along the coast, river banks, canals, etc. to prevent flooding.
24. **figure** : In skating, a fixed pattern of twists and turns.

24. **cut their King's head** : 'cut' is used first in the ordinary sense and then in the sense of 'carry out correctly the movements of'. An example of 'pun'. (See dictionary)

Charles I of England, having quarrelled with his Parliament, tried to rule without one. The result was a civil war in which the Parliamentary party, led by Oliver Cromwell, defeated the supporters (called Royalists, Cavaliers, etc.) of King Charles. Cromwell became the head of the new-born 'Commonwealth' as Lord Protector and King Charles was tried and beheaded in 1649. His son, Charles, Prince of Wales, who had fled England in 1646, returned to become Charles II in 1660.

25. **mynheer** : The Dutch form of 'My Lord', 'Mr.' or 'Sir'.
26. **Hampton Court** : a palace on the Thames, near London.
26. **let in the Spanish fleet** : Catholic Spain and Protestant England had been mortal enemies for a long time and, even long after the destruction of the great Spanish Armada in 1586, there were persistent rumours of fresh Spanish attempt at invasion.
31. **The Hague** : capital of Holland.
33. **study the canals, etc.** : 'study' is used here in two different senses at once. Another pun.
33. **the cause** : the object to which they were devoted, viz., bringing back the Stuarts to the England throne.
34. **but in this case, etc.** : *His* knots were sealed.

(impossible to tie) indeed.

35. **to start a miniature**, etc. : The logs were piled high and the movement of his legs caused many of these to come down. It was like a fall of land from a hillside on a small scale.

37. **Naesby, Worcester** : In 1645, the Royalists were defeated in the battle of Naesby. In 1651, Cromwell defeated the Scots at Worcester and Charles, Prince of Wales, whom the Scots had accepted as their king, went back to France. For nine years he lived in France and the Netherlands, surrounded by a court of exiles.

40. **the man in the moon** : Popular fancy has made a shadowy part of the moon represent the figure of a man.

41. **ghostly** : unreal, because so faintly visible.

42. **ostler** : One who has care of the horses in an inn.

43. **watch dog** : One who guards zealously the interests of a person or a party.

43. **like water** : '*weak as water*' is a common expression meaning '*extremely weak*'.

45. **shown their hand** : revealed their purpose.

Words to learn

amateur	assassinate	cower	desolate
eerie	embed (ded)	loom	message
sinister	ravenous	smoulder	

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly answer the following questions :

(a) What is the '*Sealed Knot*' ?

- (b) What is the conspiracy of the 'Gentlemen of the Sealed Knot' here ?
- (c) Why does Dr. Pharaoh send Ralph to the inn at Bresken ?
- (d) How does Ralph come to be suspected by the three conspirators at the inn of being a spy ?
- (e) '**...and it was no small hole in the ice he made.**' (p. 45). Account for the feeling of satisfaction behind this statement.
- (f) '**But the death of this boy is not necessary.**' (p. 33) What have you to say about this in view of what happens later ?
2. How does Ralph Selden come into the story of the conspiracy ?
 3. Write on Ralph Selden as the boy hero of the story.
 4. Describe, in not more than 15 lines, *the final scene of the drama.*
 5. Describe briefly what to you is the most exciting part of the story.
 6. Show how accidents influence the course of the story.
 7. When you are feeling uncertain and uneasy about the future, you are said to be in 'a state of suspense'. Where, in this story, do you have this feeling ?
 8. The scene of the story is Holland. Bring together as many bits of information as you can about the country from this story.

4. THE CABULIWALLAH ✓

47. **calls a crow a krow** : In the original story Ramdayal's word for 'crow' is *kaua* while the Bengali word is '*kak*'.
48. **where Protap Singh, etc.** : Tagore is, on the sly, making fun of the highly romantic novels of love and adventure once beloved of the Bengali reading public.
49. **Abdurrahaman, etc.** : Towards the last quarter of the 19th century it was widely believed that the Russians were planning to invade India. As the route from Russia lay through Afghanistan, the possible attitude of its ruler was, of course, of great importance. Abdurrahaman was **Emir** of Afghanistan from 1881 to 1901.
51. **in all her tiny dignity, etc.** : Seated on the bench, the tiny girl seemed to be receiving the homage of the big-bodied man at her feet.
51. **new-fangled** : novel, different from the old fashion. The word often carries a sense of disapproval.
51. **euphemism** : It is the substitution of a mild expression for a blunt, unpleasant one.
52. **in its setting** : in pleasant surroundings.
52. **a vegetable existence** : the life of a plant which is, of course, fixed at one place ; an inactive, therefore, dull life.
53. **an English sailor** : i.e., from a ship at port, on shore-leave. These men were often ill-behaved, particularly when drunk.

54. **bebagged** : carrying several bags.
56. **sense of ablution in the air** : 'ablution' is a washing of the body, sometimes a ceremonial washing, as before worship. After the rains, the air felt fresh and clean.
56. **sordid** : unclean and mean-looking.
57. **my heart shrank** ; 'I had a feeling of aversion'.
58. **his little Parbati** : 'Parbati' means 'daughter of a mountain'. The Cabuliwallah's daughter was born and bred among mountains. 'Parbati' is one of the names of the goddess Durga, daughter of *Himalaya*.

Words to learn

conjure (up)	curtail	demur	despondent
embark	formidable	impulsive	intervene
judicious	precarious	sordid.	

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly answer the following questions :—
- (a) The story is made to grow out of an accident. How ?
- ✓ (b) What made the Cabuliwallah come to Mini again and again ?
- (c) Why did Mini's mother object to the Cabuliwallah ?
- (d) '.....my heart shrank within itself' (p. 57) ; why ?
- (e) *The Cabuliwallah looked a little staggered at the apparition.* (p. 59) What does 'apparition' mean here ?

- (f) What made Mini's father give the hundred-rupee note to the Cabuliwallah ? ✓
2. Picture the relations of 'the two friends, so far apart in age.'
 3. How much are you told about the Cabuliwallah, his appearance and manners, and his dealings with people ? How does Tagore use Mini to bring out one particular side of the Cabuliwallah's character ?
 4. Describe the last meeting of the Cabuliwallah with Mini ? What was the effect of that meeting on the Cabuliwallah ? ✓
 5. 'But no, what was I more than he (p. 58)
 - ✓ Explain this carefully and show that this is the central idea of the story.

5. AS THE NIGHT, THE DAY

The title is from the advice given by Polonius to son Laertes in Shakespear's play, *Hamlet*.

*This above all : to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night, the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

61. **savanna** : level land with few trees and covered with low vegetation.
61. **weary** : wearying.
62. **a shimmering transparency, etc.** : Immediately above the triangular light blue flame the

- area of heated air, which was transparent, gleamed tremulously.
62. **minute tornado** : 'tornado' is a storm in which the air is violently pushed upwards from near the ground. Above the flame, the rapid movement of the heated air is spoken of as a tornado in miniature.
62. **shot forward...malevolence** : The mercury is said to have been moved by a feeling of ill-will towards the boys.
63. **see no evil**, etc.—An old moral injunction, used by Bandele with a special meaning. 'Let us forget completely what we have done and seen.'
64. **moral recrimination** : fault-finding on moral grounds.
64. **avuncular** : like an uncle at home.
64. **vernier scale** : a measuring scale giving readings in small fractions, invented by P. Vernier (1580-1637).
64. **swiped** : 'To *swipe*' is slang for 'to steal'.
65. **fizz**—a drink which makes a hissing sound when the bottle is opened.
65. **out of hand** : out of control.
65. **in a critical fashion**, etc.—The liking did not go all the way. The boys had several *but's* in their mind.
66. **embarrassedly** : Because he was a light-skinned boy among the many dark-skinned ones and, also, of a different race,—one disliked by the Africans.
66. **committed himself** : gave a definite reply to which he could be held later on.

68. **stentorian** : very loud ; from *Stentor* who, in the ancient Greek epic, *The Iliad*, is given a loud, powerful voice.
69. **divination** : the practice of knowing hidden things by magical means.
69. **the New Testament** : that division of the Bible which records the life and teachings of Christ and the foundation of the Christian Church.
69. **Ananias**, etc. : This occurs in the *Acts of the Apostles*, ch.5. The Apostles were the 12 men sent forth by Christ to spread his teachings.
70. **the Revised Version**—The *Authorized Version* of the Bible, dated 1611, was undertaken by the command of King James I of England. The *Revised Version* (1855), a revision of the *Authorized Version*, is not regarded by Abu as the true Bible.
72. **self-righteous indignation** : the anger of persons conscious of their innocence but wrongly accused.
76. **hate me even more** : Basu had always been disliked by his African schoolmates for belonging to a different and an unpopular race.
78. **that chap Basu's father etc.**, : In many west African countries a large part of the trade used to be in the hands of the Syrians. They were, mostly, rich and kept themselves separate from the rest of the people ; -hence their unpopularity. Basu's father was a Syrian.
78. **siesta** : midday or afternoon nap.
82. **be a Boy scout** : A boy scout is, of course, oath-bound to be honest and truthful.

Words to learn

coalesce
exasperate
monium

divine (vb)
fascination
stentorian

embarrass
malevolent

enigma
pande-

QUESTIONS

1. Answer the following questions very briefly :—
 - (a) **'Look here, Kojo, you are getting out of hand** (p. 65) What did Sorie mean ?
 - (b) **'Kojo and Bandele heaved sighs of relief.'** (p. 68) Why sighs *'of relief'* ?
 - (c) **'Kojo took the ends of the string gingerly with his hands.'** (p. 70) Why *gingerly* ?
 - (d) **'Oh, take it away, take it away...'** (p. 81) What made Kojo say this ?
 - (e) How do the four lines of the hymn on p. 70 apply to Kojo ?
 - (f) How do you think Basu came to confess to the breaking of the thermometer ?
2. Bandele, Basu, Kojo, Sorie—put them in the order of their importance in the story and justify your placings.
3. Kojo is good at heart, is not without conscience, but lacks strength of character. Do you agree ? Give reasons.
4. Show how, from the beginning of the story, Basu has been shown as one apart from his fellows.
5. Who is the most unpleasant character in the story ? Give reasons for your choice.
6. Show how the title fits the story.

6. THE LORD OF CHATEAU NOIR

Chateau Noir : (pron. shato Nwar) literally, (The) Black Castle.

The background of the story is the short but terrible Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

Within a month of the beginning of the war (July 1870) France had been rendered powerless to oppose a German advance and on September 2, 1870 Emperor Napoleon III had surrendered to the Germans.

Resistance continued, however. On September 4, Paris rose in rebellion, the empress-regent fled to England, and France was proclaimed a republic. Before the close of September Paris was completely invested by German troops and ultimately surrendered in January 1871.

85. **Dieppe :** seaport of France, on the English Channel.

86. **weal of dishonour** etc. : 'weal' is the mark left on the skin by a blow with a lash. Such a mark would, of course, disfigure a beautiful face. The presence of the invading army had similarly stained the honour of France.

86. **footmen :** infantrymen.

86. **foraging :** To 'forage' is to go about and forcibly carry off food for horses and cattle.

87. **Norman avarice,** etc. : As a good Frenchman he should have hated the Germans. But his avarice overcame his patriotism. The man was a Norman, and Normans were supposed to be avaricious.

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87. **sou** : a small French coin.
88. **Douay** : French General.
88. **saltire cross** : the same as St. Andrews' cross, the cross to which St. Andrews, Christian apostle and saint, was nailed was in the shape of the letter X.
90. **heraldic stonework** : The family's coat-of-arms worked in stone.
92. **cocking your pistol** : To 'cock' a pistol is to draw back its 'cock',—that part of it which, when released by the trigger, explodes the cartridge.
95. **new claret** : Not matured properly and, therefore, lacking in taste and flavour.
95. **loom** : shadowy shapes, enlarged by the darkness.
95. **gave a zest to** : made him relish the more.
- terra-cotta face** : 'brick-red face'. 'terra-cotta' is a mixture of clay and sand, hardened like bricks by fire.
96. **Its alliances** : families with which it was related by marriage.
96. **Seigneurs** : lords.
96. **The Crusader, etc.** : The Crusaders were those who took part in the expeditions to recover the Christian Holy Land from the Turks.
96. **Fronde** : Was the name given to certain factions in France, hostile to the court and to the minister Mazarin during Louis XIV's minority. They were responsible for the civil wars in

France between 1648-1653. Several members of the nobility joined the Fronde.

'cavalier' is a knight and, also, a swaggering person. The *siigneurs*', despite their different characters and ways of life, all wore the same look.

98. 'avez bitie sur moi' : Have pity on me.'
98. 'Tut tut !' : An exclamation of disapproval.
99. *Chambertin*, etc. : A famous Burgundy wine. Good wine has to be left to mature, sometimes for years ; hence, '*streaked with cobwebs*'.
100. *Weissenburg* : Here General Douay was defeated by the Germans in August, 1870.
101. *Napoleon* : A french gold coin, worth about 16 shillings.
102. 'tete-a-tete' : French for a face to face, intimate talk.
102. *caserne* : barrack.
103. *well-filled tunic* : a body showing good feeding (at home) under the jacket.
104. *the Uhlans* : Famous light cavalry in the Prussian army.

Words to learn

blazon (vb)	incorruptible	indiscreet	privation
pungent	reconnoitre	remorse	sap (vb.)
tortuous	zest.		

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly answer the following questions :—
- (a) "There broke out another war, a war of individuals" : Explain.

- (b) What was the significance of the 'saltire cross' ?
- (c) "*I have been amused to hear them say 'Avez bitie sur moi'.*" When, and why ?
- (d) "You are not quite situated upon a bed of roses yourself" : What did the Count mean ?
2. Gleän from the story as many facts as you can about the castle and put them together in a paragraph or two.
 3. "I am taking things up in their order, just as they occurred." : Show how the Count does this.
 4. The story has 'a surprise-ending'. How ?
 5. Show how the Count is cruel and kind to Captain Baumgarten by turns.
 6. Captain Baumgarten calls the Count a 'monster'. Is this your view too of the Count ? Give reasons.

7. THE BARN

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107. **it was not fit for a dog**, etc. : '*not fit for a dog*' is a colloquial idiom, '*dog*' meaning 'the most wretched creature'.
107. **lynx** : An animal of the cat variety, famous for its sharp sight. Hence the expression '*lynx-eyed*'.
108. **shelf** : ledge.
108. **tested her footing** : tested the ground under her feet to see if it was too soft or slippery.
108. **mount the fall** : climb up, as it were, the falling stream. The trout will often force its

way against the current and leap on to water at a higher level.

109. **off the skyline** : The cat had moved away from the crest of the bank where her body would have been seen against the sky.
109. **lusty generation** : vigorous children of her own to continue the family.
109. **via** : by way of.
110. **seven blind atoms**, etc. : very very small kittens yet unable to see.
110. **back-hair stood**, etc. : A sign of alertness in the face of possible danger.
110. **froze** : ceased all movement.
110. **trails dividing and meeting** : The foxes were using the same track but going in opposite directions.
110. **having tested the ground** : In the figurative sense of 'making sure that there would be no danger'.
110. **caterwauled** : To 'caterwaul', is to shriek as a cat does at certain times ; hence, to make a harsh, unpleasant noise.
111. **the little ripples**, etc. : Seen in a slow-motion film, the quick rise and fall of ripples caused by the wind on the surface of a body of water would be slowed down and, thus, seen more distinctly. Equally distinct were the *ripples* on the cat's back, caused by excitement at the moment of danger.
111. **see-saw bounds** : As the fox came forward in a series of leaps, its body looked like the

plank of a see-saw with its two ends going up and down alternately.

111. **flagged** : covered with flat stone-slabs.
111. **sound of saturation** : sounds which showed that everything outside was soaking wet.
112. **at the exact crisis, etc.** : just when the howling of the foxes was at its loudest and worst. The 'unearthly' sound would remind one of the noises made by clowns (as in a circus) playing music.
112. **complexion of things** : nature of the situation.
113. **like a skeleton with asthma** : A fanciful comparison. The wheezing of an asthmatic is bad enough, but the owl's wheezing sounded unearthly. If a skeleton could, it would wheeze thus.
113. **Reynard** : name given to the fox in old animal stories.
114. **like a chameleon** : The chameleon is a small lizard able to make itself invisible by taking on the colour of its immediate surroundings.
114. **the owl was all eyes, etc.** : The owl's eyes were busy trying to spot the enemy, its claws ready to strike, and its feathers standing on end.
114. **swaggering turkey** : The turkey is a big bird with a pompous way of walking. To 'swagger' is to walk stylishly.
115. **the tables had, etc.** : the position was the

very reverse of what it had been before, for now it was the cat hunting the foxes.

116. **varmints** : Slang form of 'vermin' (sg. & pl.), a common name for harmful creatures.

116. **Nature's dramas** : interesting and exciting incidents which Nature presents to us and which remind one of similar incidents in a play.

Words to learn

brood	lurk	nestle	peremptory
quarry	saturate	saunter	simultaneous
swagger	trail	warble.	

QUESTIONS

1. Answer the following questions in not more than two or three sentences in each case :—

(a) '**...the cat...was there for a definite purpose.**' (p. 107) 'What was the purpose? What was the cat's success?'

(b) '**...the cat was in danger, deadly danger.**' (p. 109) 'How came the danger? How did the cat escape it?'

(c) '**Thereupon the complexion of things changed somewhat suddenly.**' (p. 112) 'What was the 'complexion of things' (i) before (ii) after the change? How did the change come about?'

(d) '**They had seen quite enough of the barn and if that had been a cat hunt they would look to other fields of sport.**' How had

- 'they'* seen enough of the barn? Why would *'they'* look to other fields of sport now ?
2. Who is the 'hero' of the story ? Give reasons.
 3. What is the owl's part in the story ? Would the story be as good without the owl ?
 4. **'...the tables had definitely turned.'** How ?
 5. Look up in the dictionary '*suspense*'. Say how suspense is used in the story and how it is relieved.
 6. Make an outline of the story in about 150 words, use no description but omit no important detail.

8. THE DOCTOR'S WORD ✓

117. **on his last legs** : on the verge of utter failure or exhaustion ; here, near death.
117. **people liked to shirk**, etc. : Dr. Raman was called in only when the patient's condition was very grave indeed ; and this unpleasant fact, viz., the seriousness of the patient's condition, people were reluctant to face.
117. **whitewashing** : telling '*soothing lies*'.
117. **curt truthfulness** : The Doctor spoke out the truth (about the patient's chances) straight off, without trying to soften the harshness of it.
118. **he rolled up**, etc. : When there was the slightest hope he prepared to battle with death for the patient's life.

118. **wrapped in** : engaged wholly in matters relating to.
118. **classic** : of the highest standard of excellence.
120. **snapped** : to 'snap' is to interrupt sharply.
121. **pull through** : recover.
121. **flash up** : a sudden and momentary appearance of a favourable symptom.
122. **a deprecating noise** : a sound which seemed to express disapproval of the patient's fear of death.

Words to learn

arena bewilder deprecate essay (v.) evasive
famish ominous ruminate simulate suffuse

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly answer the following questions:—

✓(a) Why did people hesitate to call in Dr. Raman?

(b) 'He never believed that agreeable words ever saved lives.' Explain.

✓(c) "Why was the great man so evasive?" Answer the question.

(d) "He had never faced a situation like this." What was the situation?

(e) Why would not Dr. Raman ask Gopal to sign the will?

2. When you are so situated that you must choose one of two alternatives, both unpleasant, you are said to be in a *dilemma*. Did Dr. Raman find himself in a dilemma ? What was it ?
3. Show how the matter of Gopal's will made the Doctor's problem more difficult.
4. **This was the first time he was going to do a 'piece of acting.'** Explain in some detail.
5. Is '*The Doctor's Word*' an apt title for the story ? Give reasons for your answer.

9. THE GIFT OF THE MAGI ✓

The *Magi*. (pl. of *magus*) were the three 'Wise Men from the East' who, guided by a star, came to Jerusalem to present the newborn Jesus with precious gifts.

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127. **pennies** : U.S. cents, one hundred to the dollar.
127. **bulldozing** : To 'bulldoze' is to bully. Della used to try to browbeat the grocer into accepting a lower price.
127. **until one's cheeks burned, etc.** : Haggling shows stinginess. Of course, no one accused her of stinginess, but she felt the unspoken accusation of the dealers and flushed hot with a feeling of shame.

127. **sniffles** : To 'sniffle' is to draw in air sharply through the nose as one does after a fit of sobbing.

127. **Life is made up, etc.** : In life we smile but seldom ; we sob often, and most of the time be suffer from the after-effects of sobbing.

128. **It did not exactly, etc.** : To '*beggar description*' is to be beyond the power of description. The flat, with its furnishing, was not so grand as to be beyond the power of description.

Indeed, it was poor, even beggarly.

Some cities have organisations sending out men regularly to seek out and offer assistance to the very poor. The flat is spoken of as carrying the label 'beggar' and waiting, as it were, to be assisted by some 'Poor Relief Society'.

128. **flung to the breeze** : displayed light-heartedly.

128. **as though they, etc.** : With the shrinking of the income the 10 letters in 'Dillingham, seemed ready to shrink to the single letter 'D'. What was considered proper in days of prosperity now seemed to be too elaborate.

128. **Gray cat, etc.** : Gray is the colour of dullness and sadness. To Della, now, everything looked gray.

129. **a little bit near** : To Della nothing could be quite good enough for her husband.

129. **Queen of Sheba** : Sheba, an ancient kingdom of Arabia, was famous for its gold and gems. The story of the queen of Sheba's visit to the court of Solomon is told in the Bible. (1 Kings.)

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Solomon, famous for his wisdom, was king of Israel from 974 to 934 B.C.

airshaft. : An open space, with structures on all sides, providing ventilation.

129. **hardly looked the 'Sofronie'** : Her appearance, which was somewhat forbidding, did not go well with the sound of her name which suggested softness and warmth.
130. **the hashed metaphor** : the mixed, confused metaphor. 'Tripped, suggests walking with quick, light steps (as one does when feeling happy) while 'wings' suggests a bird in flight. But, who ever walked on wing;
131. **meretricious** : attracting by false show.
131. **Jim might be**, etc. : Consulting the watch would give Jim the opportunity of exhibiting the chain frequently, and the chain was certainly one for exhibition.
131. **ravages made**, etc. : The loss of her beautiful hair was because of her love for her husband, and her desire to make him a worthy present even at the cost of a great sacrifice.
131. **Coney Island chorus girl** : Coney Island is a pleasure resort of New York. In musical shows girls often appear to sing and dance together. They do not have the status of regular actresses and are, socially, looked down upon.
132. **a setter**, etc. : 'setter' is a dog trained to lie perfectly still when it scents the game. The quail is a game-bird.
133. **were numbered** : could be counted.

133. **what is the difference ?** : Where love is, such things do not matter at all.
133. **dark assertion** : mysterious statement.
134. **quick feminine change** : quick change of mood, common with women.
134. **Broadway** : A fashionable section of New York.
135. **singed cat** : a cat which suddenly feels a scorching heat.
135. **dandy** : (*colloq.*) smart, fine.
135. **manger** : a trough in which food is laid for horses and cattle. Jesus was born in the stable of an inn, and a manger was his first cradle.
135. **berring the privilege, etc.** : If you receive gifts on some occasion from several persons, you may chance to find yourself with more than one of the same article. In that case you may ask one (or more) of the givers concerned to take back the gift and give you something which you have not already received. This, says the writer, is the practice in modern times when gifts are not looked upon as so many tokens of love but as things possessing value in use.
135. **foolish children, unwisely sacrificed** : This would be the view of practical, worldly-wise people, but it is not that of the writer.

Words to learn

assert	cascade (n. & vb)	depreciate	ecstasy
impute	instigate	metaphor	patent
predominate	ravage (n & vb)		ransack

QUESTIONS

1. Each of the following sentences has a feeling or thought behind it. What is it ?
(a) **Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass.**
(b) **Her eyes were shining brilliantly.**
(c) **....but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds.**
(d) **And now suppose you put the chops on.**
2. Mention three or four facts about Della's hair, Jim's Watch, 'The combs'.
- ✓ 3. What were Della's thoughts and fears after she had parted with her hair ?
- ✓ 4. Whose was the greater sacrifice, Della's or Jim's ? Why ?
5. Sometimes 'Fate' seems to work to upset our most cherished plans through our own actions. This is called 'irony of Fate'. Is this story an example of this irony ? Give reasons.
6. Read carefully the last paragraph of the story and then explain the title 'Gift of the Magi'.

10. THE FACE ON THE WALL

Page

137. **tingle with mortification, etc. :** The speaker has an acute feeling of humiliation whenever he

recalls how he, with some others, was made a fool of by a stranger.

- 138. **in rooms** : living in hired rooms.
- 138. **Holborn** : a borough of the County of London.
- 138. **contours** : outlines.
- 139. **There was...nose** ; The shape of the nose was very unusual.
- 139. **It was...individuality** : Explained in the second part of the sentence. The face was strikingly different from the kind of faces one usually meets with ; indeed, one would but rarely come across such a face.
- 139. **legions** : Passengers in very large numbers.
- 139. **Piccadilly** : a famous London thoroughfare.
- 140. **Charing Cross** : station of the Southern Railway in London.
- 140. **Folkestone, Boulogne** : seaport of England and France, respectively, on the English Channel.
- 140. **companion-way** : staircase from the deck to the cabins.
- 142. **a ghost of itself** : a very faint and indistinct representation of what it had once been.
- 142. **contents bill** : placard or advertisement of the main items of news.
Spezzia. Perhaps *Spezia*, a great naval port of Italy.
- 142. **Pisa** : City of Italy, famous for its Leaning Tower.

143. **I rejoice**—Obviously, the speaker does not like Spanton.
144. **this snake... bosoms** : this treacherous person who returned injury for kindness.

Words to learn

allure	complicate	congregate	dominate
hearsay	intervene	mania	manifest
mortify	succumb	unique	

QUESTIONS

1. Give very brief answers to the following questions :—
 - (a) Of the several persons present at the story-telling, whom do you consider to be the most important, and why ?
 - (a) Why did the speaker feel 'mortified' ?
 - (c) Why did Rudson-Wayte disappear towards the end of the story ?
 - (d) What special claim does the stranger make for his story ?
 - (e) Exactly where does the story take a humorous turn ?
2. This is a story with a surprise ending. How ?
3. Describe the beginning and the effects of the stranger's 'mania'.
4. Forget the end of the story and say what the particularly striking things are in the stranger's story.

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